



THE

WILD CURATE

BY

J. MC. GRIGOR ALLAN.

THE WILD CURATE.

THE WILD CURATE.

A Novel.

BY

J. McGRIGOR ALLAN,

Author of

"THE COST OF A CORONET," "NOBLY FALSE," "THE LAST DAYS OF
A BACHELOR," "FATHER STIRLING," "TRUE AND FEIGNED LOVE,"
"YOUNG LADYISM," &c., &c.

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove :

* * * * *

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come ;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

—SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO.,

31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1887.

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PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

CONTENTS.

BOOK THIRD.

THE CURATE ALMOST AT THE HEIGHT OF HUMAN HAPPINESS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—A MOTHER PLEADS WITH HER SON'S ENSLAVER	1
II.—THE CONFEDERATES; PRIVATE THEATRICALS; CONDOLENCE!	18
III.—A PATRIOT! A TRAITOR IN THE CAMP! . .	50
IV.—THE CURATE'S FORTUNE TOLD: THE HUNT .	75
V.—AN ORIGINAL LOVE SCENE! A NARROW ESCAPE!	94

BOOK FOURTH.

THE CURATE'S TABLE LAND OF HAPPINESS.

I.—THE EARL'S UNPLEASANT SURPRISE! THE HYPOCRITE!	113
II.—SHIFTER'S VILE ELECTION TRICK. STEDFAST'S SPEECH	141
III.—AN OLD-FASHIONED ELECTION. SCENE AT THE HUSTINGS. MISS WILDGOOSE AT- TEMPTS TO SOFTEN POLITICAL RANCOUR! .	168
IV.—PATRICIAN AND PLEBEIAN: THE EARL, AND THE DEMAGOGUE	192
V.—DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND: THE EARL, AND SECRETARY	222
VI.—AN ELOPEMENT: THE CURATE MADE SCAPEGOAT	239
VII.—RESULTS OF THE ELOPEMENT. THE RECTOR'S RAGE. THE RECTRESS TO THE RESCUE	258

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F. V. WHITE & CO.,

31, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

THE WILD CURATE.

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BOOK THIRD.

THE CURATE ALMOST AT THE HEIGHT OF
HUMAN HAPPINESS.

CHAPTER I.

A MOTHER PLEADS WITH HER SON'S ENSLAVER!

IF Mrs. Weatherall had been a weak, narrow-minded woman, she would have gone into hysterics, real, or feigned. She would have continued to expostulate with her son, and quarrelled with him, for not eradicating from his heart, the image of Lady Honoria. But, as may be supposed, the mother of such a son was no fool. In the scene narrated in the last chapter, Mrs. Weatherall had learned much. Firstly, that to reason him out of Love, was an attempt as futile as that of Mrs. Partington, to stay the rush of the Atlantic. Mrs. Weatherall had also received much new light as to her son's real character; that, on one point, he had determined not to be thwarted. Nevertheless she resolved to do all in her power to save her son. She pitied, and to

some extent, sympathized with him. But she did not believe that Lady Honoria cared for him; or that if she did, and could be induced to marry him, she would ever make him happy. Mrs. Weatherall thought such disparity in rank, could never be overcome. Should the Curate marry Lady Honoria, her son was lost to his mother, for ever. Ninety-nine out of one hundred readers, will think Mrs. Weatherall judged the situation correctly. Yet she was perfectly loyal. She was prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice her own feelings, for her son's happiness. She would therefore see Lady Honoria, judge for herself, and try her own persuasive powers. It was an unpleasant, but indispensable office.

On a day when "William" was absent on parochial duty, Mrs. Weatherall, suitably arrayed, walked out, got into a "fly," and drove to Laxington House. The fat, lazy, and surly Cerberus, who performed the duty of hall-porter, seeing only an unfashionable elderly lady, and a hired vehicle, sniffed suggestively. He had been sitting comfortably in his great leathern chair, reading the newspaper. He evidently regarded the pull at the bell, as a personal liberty, and asked gruffly :

"Well, Missis, and what is your business?"

Determined not to be put out of temper, by the fellow's brutality, Mrs. Weatherall said :
"Is Lady Forrester at home?"

"Is your name on our visitors' book?"

"Will you take my card to your lady?"

“Taint none of my business to take in no cards. My perfushional dooty is to hopen the 'all door—that's hall.”

“Then don't exceed your duty, by keeping a visitor standing at the door, or I shall certainly inform her ladyship of your rudeness.”

Mrs. Weatherall's meek spirit was fairly roused, at the porter's British brutality, the bastard brother of Insular Independence. The fellow seemed somewhat taken aback, at this unexpected retort, which he afterwards informed a footman, he “didn't think wos in the old party.” He muttered something about not calling by appointment, and condescended to ring a bell.

A footman came, took Mrs. Weatherall's card, presently returned, and said: “Her ladyship is not at home.”

Mrs. Weatherall put a shilling into the footman's hand. He looked at it, and seemed doubtful, but concluded to pocket the affront.

“Do you mind telling me the truth? Is Lady Forrester really absent from home, or does her ladyship only decline seeing me?”

Porter and footman exchanged glances, which implied:—“Pore old thing! Knows no better! Not being, as we are, in Society.” The smirking footman replied:—“*Hentry noo*, mum, as the French say, which means, between hourselves, in strick confidence—you understand?”

“Quite.”

“ Well, then, since you arsk me, the fack is, my lady never sees nobody, not in hour visiting list, onless they calls by appintment.”

Mrs. Weatherall took out another shilling, and held it between finger and thumb. “ Would you kindly return to your lady, and say that my business is of importance. It concerns herself, quite as much as me. I shall not detain her long—half an hour, at the outside—and I shall be extremely obliged, if she will grant me an interview.”

“ Well, no ma’am, I raally couldn’t do that. It would be as much as my place is wuth, to carry sich a message, hafter my lady said ‘ Not at ’ome.’ ”

Mrs. Weatherall sighed, and was turning away. The footman (the same who had waited on the Curate), whether from natural geniality, and sympathy, or, perhaps, coveting another shilling, said: “ I’ll tell you wot, ma’am, if you wishes to see my lady werry perticler, jest you write, and arsk her ladyship to make an appintment. That’s the best way.”

“ Thank you. *You*, at least, are civil.”

Mrs. Weatherall gave him the other shilling, which elicited the curious compound word, “ Thankymarm ! ”

Lady Honoria was within. Nor was her ladyship very particularly engaged. It would be unjust to Lady Honoria, to suppose that she caused herself to be denied to Mrs. Weatherall, from mere vulgar pride, and a desire to wound her visitor’s feelings. Lady

Honoria was far too well-bred for that. She left such meanness to *parvenus*, who think to exalt themselves, by abasing others. Why, then, was poor Mrs. Weatherall jingling back in her “fly,” for which she would have to pay four and six, besides tipping the footman, all to no purpose? The true reason was, that Lady Honoria shrank from an unpleasant interview. She had been expecting, and dreading such a visit. However, that evening her ladyship received a note, which ran thus :

“TO LADY FORRESTER, of Laxington House.

“MADAM,—I particularly wish to see your ladyship, on a matter of the utmost importance to my son, myself, and, possibly, to you also. I entreat your ladyship to grant me an interview at your own house, or at mine, or at any place, and on any day and hour, most convenient, and oblige

“Your obedient Servant,

“HENRIETTA WEATHERALL.”

Lady Honoria immediately dispatched this reply :—

“MADAM,—Your note of to-day received. I shall be at home to-morrow at noon, and will be happy to make your acquaintance, if you will do me the honour to call on

“Yours obediently,

“HONORIA FORRESTER.”

Next day, accordingly, the interview took place. Mrs. Weatherall was punctual, and was at once admitted. The porter was as respectful as it was in the nature of the beast, to be, to a person not in Society. The footman preceded her upstairs, along a corridor, and knocked at a door. It was opened by Miss Minckes. Mrs. Weatherall entered, and found herself in a beautiful boudoir. Lady Honoria rose to receive her visitor, and said: "Mrs. Weatherall, I believe?"

"The same, at your ladyship's service."

"Pray be seated. Miss Minckes, you may leave us."

Miss Minckes bowed, withdrew with a cattish face, and drew the door so very gently after her, that it was a question whether it was actually *closed*!

"Now, Mrs. Weatherall, I am quite at your service. Will you not sit nearer the fire? The weather is cold."

Lady Honoria affected an ease, she did not feel. She played with a large feather-fan, with which she shielded her face, more from her visitor's observation, than from the fire.

"Lady Forrester," began Mrs. Weatherall, "I fear I am an intruder on your privacy, but, if you will hear me patiently, you will admit that, as a *mother*, I could take no other course."

"Pray make no apologies, Mrs. Weatherall. I am happy to make your acquaintance."

“Your ladyship can guess why I am here. I come to speak on my son’s behalf.”

Lady Honoria played nervously with her fan. Mrs. Weatherall continued :

“You have, doubtless, noticed a great change in him since he made your ladyship’s acquaintance.”

“Ah! yes, you allude to his hunting. Certainly, Mr. Weatherall was strongly prejudiced against that, and other field-sports. But he has now judged from experience, and, naturally, like many more, has altered his mind. You, surely, Mrs. Weatherall, are not like those straitlaced ladies, who would debar the clergy from all field-sports?”

“Lady Forrester, I have not spirits to discuss abstract questions. I should not so much mind William hunting, though it is a dangerous pastime, and there is a strong prejudice against hunting-parsons. But the change in my son’s habits, has gone much further. Everyone notices it. Your ladyship must have observed it.”

“I, and my friends, have noticed a vast improvement in Mr. Weatherall. He enjoys life. He was working too hard. I beg to congratulate you on the visible improvement in his health. He rides thirteen stone. He told me he has gained a stone in two months. He is our most fearless rider. Quite an acquisition to our country circle. You must be proud of him.”

“I am proud of him. But—oh! my lady—

I have not the heart to bandy compliments, or fence, or beat about the bush. Excuse my want of conventionality, my plain speaking, and let me come to the point."

"Certainly. By all means." Lady Honoria glanced at a tiny jewelled watch, which peeped out below her broad girdle.

"Then, Lady Forrester—pardon my abruptness. I have discovered my son's secret—he *loves you!*"

All Lady Honoria's patrician breeding and tact, could not prevent a movement, almost a start, and a decided blush, as Mrs. Weatherall continued :

"Yes, believe me, lady, he loves you fondly, truly, as ever man loved woman ; as it is the privilege of few women to be loved. He has astonished me, his mother, by the awful intensity of his feelings."

"May I ask why you tell me this?"

"Oh, Lady Forrester, what a question ! Can you not guess my motive ? Does not your own heart tell you why I, his mother, am here?"

"No — I cannot guess — stay — has Mr. Weatherall commissioned you to tell me this?"

"He !—William ! You little know his independence. I believe he would never forgive me for thus interfering, if he knew. No ; I came here yesterday, and to-day, entirely on my own responsibility, and without his knowledge, or suspicion. I know him too well ; to try and obtain his consent."

"It is enough. I am quite satisfied."

"But, Lady Forrester, *I* am not satisfied. You cannot deceive me, by this affectation of astonishment. You must have known long ago, before I knew, the state of my son's feelings towards you. Such love as his, could not be concealed from its object. You knew before to-day, that my son loves you. You cannot deny it."

"Madam!" replied Lady Honoria, in a slightly supercilious tone, "It is not usual for a woman of fashion, to attempt to divine the sentiments of all the gentlemen of her acquaintance. In Society, gentlemen who desire to make their sentiments known, address the lady first. At least, that is the custom in our *monde*."

"All this is very true, and not new to me; but, Lady Forrester, you avoid acknowledging my statement. You have known for some time, that my son loves you."

"I may have fancied that he was partial to my society. But I have grown too accustomed to that sort of thing, to pay any attention to it."

"Ah! Lady Forrester, if you really think that my son entertains no warmer sentiment than partiality for you, believe me, you quite underrate the depth of his feeling. He loves you to distraction."

"Be it so, madam, I cannot help it. What am I to do?"

"Lady Forrester, listen to me. Be patient

—bear with me. You know the pathetic parable told by Nathan to David, of the rich man, who took the poor man's, one lamb. Well, I am even in a worse position than that poor man was. You have taken my *son* from me."

"How? He is with you still. Are you so fond of him, that you cannot bear him out of your sight? Do you grudge him the pleasures of Society? Are you jealous of the time he spends with us, or in the hunting field?"

"So far from it, that I encouraged him to accept your ladyship's first invitation to Laxington House. But for me, he would have declined. Little did I think to what it would lead. My son is with me *bodily*. In *spirit* he is far away. You, Lady Forrester, have come between us. Once he was all my own. Now, he belongs to you. I had planned his future. He was to marry, and settle near, or with his mother. I thought I should have two children. Now all these hopes are destroyed. Lady Forrester, I plead with you, as woman to woman. Give me back my son. You are young, beautiful, noble, gifted. You have the world before you. You must have many suitors, far more eligible than William. Amid all this wealth, it is cruel to grudge me my son, to rob me of the delight of my eyes, the prop of my declining years, the solace of my old age. Oh, dear lady, I will not believe that you can be cruel and relentless! If, in the thoughtlessness of your heart, if in the

high spirits of youth, and the pride of life, you have done me this great wrong, strive to repair it, and God will bless you ; and if you live to be a happy wife and mother, you will rejoice that you complied with my prayer."

Lady Honoria turned her head away. She seemed touched by the eloquent language of deep feeling. Mrs. Weatherall drew near, and, in the earnestness of her appeal, laid her hand upon Lady Honoria's arm.

"Dear, good, kind, beautiful young lady, I wish to think well of you. I have been young. You cannot know, or conceive, all the anguish you are causing me. You cannot comprehend the dark future you are preparing for my unhappy son——"

"But what can I do? or, rather, what have I done, that you speak to me thus?"

"My dear lady, the case is very simple. You either reciprocate my son's attachment or you do not. Some day or other, he may find courage to tell you that he loves you."

"It will not be the first time I have heard such a statement from a gentleman."

"I can easily believe it. But I doubt if your ladyship ever awakened in any admirer, a sentiment, or rather a genuine passion, equal or akin to, what my son feels for you. He adores you. Yet he has not the courage to breathe his affection in words. Lady Forrester, when he has the courage to learn his fate from you, will you accept or reject him?"

“Ladies of rank, are not in the habit of wedding curates!” Lady Honoria spoke with *hauteur*, in that cold, hard, aristocratic, metallic tone, deprived of all feminine softness, which she occasionally used, when the devil pride got the upper hand!

“I expected such an answer, Lady Forrester. Then, I am very sorry to find, that ladies of your rank, are in the habit of encouraging the attentions of men, whom they do not intend to marry!”

“I make all allowances for your feeling, Mrs. Weatherall, but it all depends on what you choose to call encouragement. I have no more encouraged Mr. Weatherall, than I have encouraged Captain Rasper, Lord Oddfish, Captain Tearaway, Mr. Hawbuck, or any other gentleman, who visits at Laxington House, and accepts my father’s hospitality. That I have been kind to your son, I admit. I saw in him a young gentleman, not *au fait* in the manners of Society. I simply wished to give him *la carte du pays*, in other words, to make him feel at home. It appears that his good opinion of himself, has led him egregiously to mistake these ordinary civilities of his hostess, for something more. I regret his mistake, but I cannot take the blame to myself. Your son is still very young. Men who mix in the world, do not fall into such errors; do not fancy that because a lady finds some *délassement* in their society, that her sentiments go

beyond friendship, far less, that she is prepared to drop into their arms."

"Very well, Lady Forrester. Let us clearly understand each other."

"I am trying to emulate your frankness."

"You say you have no feeling but that of *Friendship* for my son. There is one very simple way by which you can prove your sincerity. Act like his *friend*!"

"How?"

"Dismiss him at once. It will be merciful. He may be able to bear the blow, *now*. Every day that passes, will make the trial more terrible.

"It is not customary in Society, to be rude. *We* are not in the habit of dismissing our visitors and guests, unless their conduct is so *outré*—so extravagant, as to render such a step absolutely necessary."

"Lady Forrester, I quite understand you. You refuse to open my son's eyes to his infatuation. Now—whether you have consciously encouraged him or not; now—that you are duly apprized of his delusion—you admit it to be such—you owe it to him, to me, to yourself, and to your sex, to let him know the truth at once—that you do not reciprocate his passion—that you have no intention of accepting his proposals—that you consider him only worthy to be a *friend*, but too far beneath you, to aspire to the honour of your hand. Rudeness is not required. You can easily open his eyes, if you choose. You

certainly can cease inviting him to Laxington House, and most certainly, after this conversation, you ought to do so."

"Mrs. Weatherall, I am obliged to you, for thus minutely instructing me, in the proprieties. I admit I am your junior. Yet *I* have had some opportunities of seeing the world. Your son is surely old enough to be out of leading-strings. And in delicate explanations of this kind, a lady cannot take the initiative. Should your son honour me with a proposal, there will be time enough to reply to his pretensions, as I have to others. Much, of course, will depend on the way in which the gentleman speaks."

"This, then, is your last word, Lady Forrester. A Mother pleads with you not, to break her son's heart, by playing with his best affections. And you put me off with worse than trifling. Oh, Lady Forrester, I hoped that you were belied, when I heard you called a flirt, and a coquette; but I fear it is true, that you have a bad heart."

"Much obliged to you, for telling me so politely, what people say of me. I see no use in prolonging this singular interview, which, I beg to remind you, was not sought by me; unless we entirely change the subject. Pray excuse my forgetfulness. Let me offer you some refreshment. I will ring."

"No, Lady Forrester! Ring for no refreshments for me. Yesterday, you refused to admit me into your house, and let me

parley at your hall-door, with your menials. I had my journey in vain. To-day, you remind me that I am an intruder! Do not wonder that I decline hospitality, offered on such terms. I refuse to break bread, or pour wine, with you. I make no pretensions to be your social equal. Yet I too have seen some Society, and I did not believe that any lady of rank and breeding, could behave, as you have behaved to me."

Mrs. Weatherall walked to the door. On reaching it, she turned suddenly, and said emphatically:—

"Lady Forrester, I hope, I think, your conscience will reproach you, for not granting a mother's reasonable request. Should it do so, please to write and tell me, and I will thank and pray for you. But, O lady, if you harden your heart, as Pharaoh did—then dread Divine vengeance! As sure as there is a God, who sees our motives, if you persevere in your wicked career, of playing with my son's affections, in winning a heart, for which you care not; in accepting the devotion, the almost idolatrous devotion, of a man whom you do not intend to marry; you will have on your conscience, his death or moral ruin; you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave! All this you may be able to bear—but more—and my age entitles me to speak in a prophetic strain—Evil was never yet wrought with impunity. You will bring punishment

upon yourself. Yes, lady ; at this moment, I almost pity you. I see a vision of the possible future. I announce—that you may avoid it. Oh, may it never come to pass ! If you persist in dealing falsely with my son, *some serious calamity will happen to yourself !* ”

With these parting words, Mrs. Weatherall quitted the apartment, and fairly ran against Miss Minckes outside the door !

Miss Minckes looked confused, but soon recovered, and said : “ I was waiting in the corridor, to show you the way, or you will get lost in this barrack of a house. ”

She piloted Mrs. Weatherall downstairs, left her under convoy of a footman, and returned to the boudoir.

Wonderful is the power of genuine emotion. Mrs. Weatherall was to all appearance, a commonplace, characterless, elderly lady. She had not received the modern “ higher education. ” Possibly, this had something to do with the fact, that her natural abilities, if not sharpened, had at least not been dulled, and weakened, by Over Education. A smattering of many things. Nothing thoroughly understood ! She had never learned elocution. Yet an orator might have envied her, her closing speech, spoken *extempore*, without hesitation. She had not entered a theatre, for twenty-five years. Yet a first-rate actress might have taken her for a model. Her delivery and action were both

unstudied, unconscious; therefore, natural, and perfect. Her voice rose with the intensity of her feelings. She raised her hand in a dignified gesture of reproof, and warning. But when she shaded her eyes, as if to exclude some terrific vision of the future, which she prayed might never come to pass, she positively appalled the listener! It would be more correct to say both listeners—Lady Honoria within, and Miss Minckes, close to the partially opened door, outside the room!

Lady Honoria had no reason to congratulate herself, on the recent interview. Mrs. Weatherall had borne herself with perfect propriety. She never forgot herself; never lost her temper, or condescended to vulgar railing. Her reproof was dignified, and effective. In the wordy duel between the two ladies, the plebeian had triumphed over the patrician. Lady Honoria sat, lying back on a low arm-chair, and gazing vacantly into the fire. Her fan had fallen on the floor. She looked prostrated. So profound was her abstraction, that she did not notice Miss Minckes enter the room.

“Do you want me, my lady?”

Lady Honoria started, looked up and replied sternly—

“No; I will send for you when I do.”

Miss Minckes retired, and walked hastily to the library, where she found Mr. Blackadder alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONFEDERATES! PRIVATE THEATRICALS! CONDOLENCE!

APPARENTLY, Mr. Blackadder had been expecting Miss Minckes. He closed the door, carefully; seized her hand, and led, or rather dragged her, across the room, to a couple of chairs between the fire, and one of the windows.

"Now," he said, when they were seated, "we are not likely to be overheard, by any of those prying household spies, called servants." (He himself was the greatest spy of all.) "But," he added, "speak low: walls have ears."

Intelligent readers have perhaps already guessed the mutual understanding between the private Secretary and the Companion, attached as they were by mutual depravity. Of them, it might be truly said:

"Sure such a pair were never seen
So fitly formed, to meet by nature."

But the concluding couplet would not be applicable.

The following confidential conversation will excite interest, rather than surprise. As soon as she recovered her breath, Miss Minckes said:

"The old lady has just gone."

"I know that."

"She had rather a long interview with Lady Honoria."

"Well, you listened—did you not?"

"I did, as you told me to do so."

"Dear innocent! Of course, you were most unwilling! Woman's great failing is a total deficiency in curiosity, inherited from Mother Eve! However, make me responsible. I have broad shoulders. Only tell me all you know."

"Well, the old lady was rather excited, and spoke distinctly, and rather loud. So I did not lose much."

"Good!" said the confederate, rubbing his hands with satisfaction; while Miss Minckes reported the substance of the private conversation, she had so artfully overheard. During the narration, he frequently ejaculated, "Good," "Excellent," "Nothing can be better." When she had finished, he looked full in her face, and asked:

"Well, what do you think of your precious model curate's chances, now?"

"I think him very much to be pitied."

"Perhaps you do pity him? You forgive his contemptuous slight of you. Excellent Christian! you do credit to your teachers!"

"For all your taunts, I think he has been punished enough."

"Why, he has not been punished at all. He rides out hunting with Lady Honoria and

the Earl, like a tip-top swell, and dines here once a week. He is *l'ami de la maison*."

"The greater will be his fall, when he gets his *congé*. You know what's hanging over the poor dupe. Her ladyship don't really care for him, and is only waiting for an opportunity to cast him off, like others. I should not like him to go mad, or commit suicide."

"Tush! he's not such a fool as that. But don't you be so sure, Lady Honoria does not care for him."

"Why, you know we both agreed that her ladyship was playing a game; that she asked the Curate here, only to make a fool of him; to make him recant his views against Field Sports; to exhibit him in the hunting-field, and expose him as a turncoat, and time-server, to the County people; and then, to let him sink into his former insignificance."

"I did, and still think, that *was* her Ladyship's intention. And you can't deny he made a precious fool of himself that evening? going to bed before dinner; mistaking the butler for the chaplain: and *me* for a servant! However, I paid him off for that "

"But you infer that her ladyship has now changed her mind?"

"Not deliberately. But I think she has a much better opinion of the Curate, than she had at first. Lady Honoria is a thorough *woman*; as heartless and cruel, as the rest of her sex."

“Thanks! There are no heartless and cruel *men*!”

“Don’t rile up, Matilda. I pay you a compliment, in stating honestly, my low opinion of your sex. If I thought you a fool, I would flatter and lie to you, as I do to all other women. The fools like it. They get it, and deserve nothing better.”

Miss Minckes swallowed this! She was no match in cunning, for the consummate villain by her side. Otherwise, she would have discovered that he was flattering and lying to her now; making her his tool, to serve his turn, and build his own separate fortune; treating her as Richard III. treated Lady Anne.

Miss Minckes replied: “But, if you think so badly of Lady Honoria, why suppose she has changed her intention of jilting the Curate? You seem inconsistent.”

“I will explain. If the Curate had been, like most of his Order, a mere mannikin, a nose of wax, a cake of dough; she would have pursued her original plan; if she hadn’t tired of the whole thing in a week. You and I know curates, who would have sickened her ladyship in that time. Suppose she had tried it on with the Reverend Beeswax, or Softy, or Flummery, or any other specimens of the ‘tame cat’ species, of no earthly use but to fawn and purr about their female proselytes; and bite, scratch, and spit, at all who stroke their fur the wrong way. Why, their un-

disguised servility, flunkeyism, inanity, and crawling sycophancy, would have disgusted her. The game would not have been worth the candle. But your Curate is an exception to that bad lot; a very different sort of bird."

"Don't call him *my* curate."

"Well, the bird you tried to catch, before you took up with me. I believe you have a sneaking kindness for the earwig, still."

"Oh, Aaron! how can you say so? You know I belong to you, body and soul!"

"I hope you do. But I warn you, I shall have my doubts, if you try and interfere, to save this autem-bawler from his deserts. You are pledged to me."

"Never fear, I shall not interfere; but go on."

"I've special personal reasons for hating this Curate, over and above his being a parson; one of the drones of the community, living on the fat of the land, and preaching for money. He is my rival!"

He looked steadily at Miss Minckes, as he said this. She evidently took the words in the sense, he intended her to understand them (though susceptible of another very different meaning), and replied:

"You are quite mistaken. The Curate never thought of me—never gave me the least encouragement. Nor, frankly and candidly, did I care much about him."

"Oh! it was only a bit of flirtation *à la*

Lady Honoria, merely to keep your hand in. He certainly was an awful slow-coach then. But now, that he leads the hunting-field, on Saladin, he might make any man jealous. Eh, you *minx*!" he added, punning unpleasantly upon her name.

Miss Minckes was rather pleased than otherwise, to find her lover jealous. She replied caressingly:

"Aaron, I did not then know *you*! You know perfectly well, I care nothing for any man but you."

"You tell me so often enough."

"I have proved it too," said the girl, with sad significance.

"Then don't act as if you were jealous of Lady Honoria——"

She darted a quick glance at him, as he added:

"*With the Curate!* Don't grudge her, her little flirtation with your old sweetheart. If you do, you will make me jealous, in spite of your protests and proofs!"

"I abandon him henceforth to you, and her."

"All right! I hate the fellow, but I can't despise him. He's got the stuff of a man in him; what old Spry calls 'the clear grit.' The Curate has sense and pluck. I've plenty of *moral* courage, but I don't care to risk my neck, as these fox-hunting fools do. My brains are too valuable. Well, I believe Lady Honoria is far from indifferent to him. *Entre*

nous, I believe she likes him better than anyone else, at present!"

"What! better than Captain Rasper?"

"Far better. Weatherall is good-looking. He only wants a red coat, to look as well as any of them. He looks quite smart, in his London-made clothes, and in that purple hunting-coat he wears. In my belief, if he cut the Church, for the Army, he'd cut 'em all out."

"Perhaps you are right. She surely must fancy him, or else the old lady would have prevailed on her to give him up. His mother's tactics were good. First, she tried to soften her ladyship. But that was useless. So the old lady tried to frighten her. And I do think she succeeded. I am sure her parting words did frighten Lady Honoria. I know they frightened me."

"You must do your best, Matilda, to remove that impression."

"Why? Why don't you take me wholly into your confidence? Trust me altogether. Then I could help you better. Do you want her ladyship to marry the Curate, or do you not? If you do not, leave his mother's pleading to work out its effect. Lady Honoria is already all but persuaded to give him up. Is he not punished enough?"

"No, I tell you. He's not punished at all, yet."

"But he will be, if Lady Honoria drops him now, as his mother wishes."

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, but Aaron, are you not playing a very dangerous game? Are you sure you will not over-reach yourself? Suppose Lady Honoria really smitten, as you think. If it goes on much longer, she may not be able to give him up. The Curate may propose, and she may accept him.”

“She is quite capable of doing that. She would make lots of lovers miserable for a few days, and possibly kill her papa. A double inducement!”

Miss Minckes stared at Mr. Blackadder. Was he in earnest? Or was it only his usual scoffing manner? He continued:

“A fit of gout in the stomach, would carry off the Earl. If he did get over it, he might be induced to forgive his only child, and push her husband up in the State-Church, or give him his choice of a commission in the Army. All those Reverend ‘swells,’ our Sporting Parsons, have mistaken their profession. You see, I look at all aspects of the affair.”

“Well, then, if you think that possible, how do you serve your, or our ends, by promoting a possible marriage between the two? Do be frank, Aaron.”

“Well, Matilda, I will. I watch, and wait upon events. I can’t control them, but I can step in, as *Deus ex machinâ*, to turn them partially or wholly to our advantage; and to pick all possible profit out of them. Here are my calculations. Suppose Lady Honoria

is persuaded or frightened into dropping the Curate at once. He gets over it. People don't die of love, out of romances. Where is your revenge, either on him, or her? A little ordinary flirtation—a mere matter of course. The Wild Curate no worse, Lady Honoria no worse; and so the matter ends. On the other hand, suppose you help Lady Honoria, to banish all recollection of the old lady's visit, the flirtation goes swimmingly on. Lady Honoria and her curate get daily deeper in the mud. Some day he avows his love."

"What happens?"

"That's the question."

"I can't say."

"Nor I; but I have shrewd suspicions."

"Do let me hear."

"Well, there are three courses, as Gladstone says. Lady Honoria is as proud as Lucifer, as you know."

"None better. She spoke to me, after the old lady had gone, as if I were a housemaid."

"Add *that* to the long list of grudges you owe her."

Miss Minckes's vindictive looks plainly said, she would!

"Well, then, if the devil Pride happens to be stronger than the angel Love, in her ladyship's bosom, at that precise time, she may give the Curate a plump refusal, snub him, and send him about his business."

"It would be merciful in the long run."

“You are right. And for this reason. I doubt whether she will. Women are fickle. ‘*Varium et mutabile semper Fœmina*,’ is as true now, as when Virgil wrote it. All the higher education in the world, won’t alter that. You may over-educate a woman into a prig, a pedant, or an idiot. You won’t change her nature. *Apropos*: Look at that old fool, Miss Wildgoose, priding herself on her strong-mindedness; setting her cap at the Earl, and making herself a laughing-stock to everybody, even the servants, while she thinks no one sees her game. Women are cruel, as well as fickle. They like to play with, tease, and torment their lovers, until they get hold of men strong enough to tame them. Lady Honoria is a thorough woman. She has a natural *penchant* towards cruelty. She loves to hunt and kill animals. Not merely stinking foxes, but beautiful innocent deer and timid hares. But there is one animal she loves to torment more than all.”

“What animal do you mean?”

“How dull you are. Her ladyship’s favourite quarry is—Man!”

“Ah, yes; you’re right there. You thoroughly understand her,” said Miss Minckes, with an admiring glance at her lover.

He continued, with a cynicism worthy of Swift, of whom Dr. Johnson wrote:—“If his general thoughts on women, were such as he exhibits, a very little sense in a lady, would

enrapture, and a very little virtue would astonish him."

"I have studied your sex thoroughly. Women are too mischievous, to be altogether despicable! But the Sporting Lady forms a distinct class. To her sex's natural propensity to cruelty, she adds a special and peculiar pleasure, in inflicting pain. I quite agree with Balzac:—'Most women who ride skilfully, are wanting in tenderness. Like the Amazons, they are deficient in one breast. Their hearts are as hard as flint somewhere, though you cannot tell the exact spot.'"

"You are right. I have seen her ladyship punish her horse severely. I have heard her also use very unladylike language. You know she considers servants like dirt. When in a passion, she don't care what she says before them."

"Or us either. So we pick up secrets. There is some advantage in being insignificant. Something to set against our daily humiliation, and to stimulate our revenge. Tell me to what you refer."

"You know, Lady Hcnoria is not satisfied with being the best horsewoman in the hunt. She aims at being an expert whip. She's determined to rival that odious Mrs. Driver, who exhibits herself continually on the coach-box, with her poor insignificant husband cowering beside her! So her ladyship, you know, coaxed her papa into letting her take lessons in driving from the coachman."

"I remember."

"Well, the Earl does not like it. But, you know, he can't resist her wheedling. And she does take regular lessons from the coachman. Only think of her condescending to that!"

"Yet, Rads call her ladyship proud," said Blackadder, laughing for the first time. He had a very sinister, unpleasant, grating laugh. You can tell character by a laugh. The man, or woman, who laughs heartily, is seldom malevolent, vindictive, or dangerous. Beware of the person who never, or rarely laughs, and then only a short, hard, strident, sneering laugh, like a human hyena!

"What a picture it would make," continued Blackadder. "A lady of quality taking lessons from her own coachman! How many of her despairing lovers would like to take Coachee's place! Coachee will give her ladyship a peculiar grace, and add an extra polish to her aristocratic manner! The pleasure of his company will improve her mind!"

"Rather say, it makes her more stuck-up than ever. She is afraid of being civil lest it lead to familiarity. She behaves as if servants had no feelings. The other day, she threw herself on a sofa, while a footman was present, in a free-and-easy manner, which I should have been sorry to copy, before a *female* servant. The man noticed it, and spoke about it afterwards."

"Doubtless, her ladyship often forms the subject of comment, in the servants' hall."

"That don't trouble her in the least. I heard her say, she wasn't curious to know what *menials* said of mistresses, behind their backs."

"She glanced at *you* and *me* there—depend upon it."

"I think she did."

"You have a long list of such obligations scored against her ladyship. The day of reckoning is rapidly approaching. But go on about the lessons in driving. The Patrician Pupil, and Plebeian Preceptor! Ha! ha! Positively, I have a mind to commission a clever artist, to paint such a picture. It would make its mark in the exhibition. So many fashionable dames would think it personal. Go ahead, Matilda."

"Well, you know, my lady occasionally exhibits her skill as a driveress. At first she was rather unfortunate. You remember when she lost all command of her ponies, and they dashed right into Widow Granger's front garden. In time she got more skilful; advanced from ponies to carriage-horses. Generally with a pair; sometimes she tries a four-in-hand. She is most eager to outvie Mrs. Driver. I believe, too, her ladyship has some idea of getting up a Ladies' Four-in-hand Club, if she can get enough of her fast female fashionable friends, to keep her in

countenance. Occasionally, she takes me out for an airing. I sit on the box beside her."

"Do you know why she takes you out sitting beside her?"

"She says, to give me a good blow, for the benefit of my health."

"And you believe that?"

"You think it is to show her condescension?"

"Aye, and more than that. You serve as a foil to her ladyship's beauty."

The malignant brutality of this insult, might have opened the eyes of Miss Minckes, had she not been completely under the spell of the human reptile, appropriately named Black Adder! She implicitly believed the lie, and credited Lady Honoria with a baseness, utterly foreign to her nature.

"The next time her ladyship asks me to accompany her for a drive, I shall refuse," said Miss Minckes, unable to conceal her mortification.

"Don't be such a fool. You'll offend her ladyship, and perhaps lose your place. Be a philosopher, like me. Copy my example. Pocket the affront. Score it with the rest, against her ladyship, as I do mine against the Earl."

"I will."

"Next time, she asks you to accompany her, go. Dress and look your very level best, as old Spry says. You may be taken for the

Mistress, and she for the Companion! Who knows? You may make a conquest. Your features are regular. As for that little cast in the eye, *I* need not tell *you*, some people admire it! Now, go ahead, as the Yankee says."

"Well, one day, just as we had cleared Laxington, the horses turned restive, and pulled very hard. My arms would soon have been tired, and my fingers blistered. But my lady seemed rather to like the fun. She wears strong tan driving-gloves. One of the grooms offered to take the reins. 'Wait till I order you,' snaps her ladyship, standing up, and punishing the horses, as she called it; that is, flogging them unmercifully, with her long whip, with such lady-like accompaniments as 'You will—will you? I'll master you. I'll give it you.' 'That's right, my lady!' cries the other groom. 'Give the off-leader, his hiding, and don't spare him.' To which she elegantly responded: 'I'll take the vice out of you! I'll teach you to jib, and shirk the collar. There!' Once, I heard her come out with an exclamation, which sounded very like an oath. And if you'd only seen her colour, while she was tugging at the reins, and double thonging, as she calls it, the leaders, with her long, tandem-whip! I don't think the Curate would have admired her, as I saw her then!"

"What a graphic description! I can almost sketch the scene. It would serve her

right to do so, and send the sketch to her anonymously."

"And then, she would know at once that I had blabbed. Of course you're joking?"

"Of course! Now to return to the three courses. Course number one has been considered—positive refusal. Now for number two. If love be stronger than pride, her ladyship may accept the Curate. Now for number three——"

"How, number three? She must either refuse or accept him."

"No; there is a third course, a compromise, which she is very likely to take; neither to refuse, nor to accept absolutely. She may give him an evasive answer, with just enough of encouragement, to keep the poor dupe at her beck and call, until he learns from experience, that hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

"You are right. Now I think of it, Lady Honoria is very likely to take that course, for many reasons."

"You perceive it's the safest. For thus, she does not commit herself one way or the other. If the old woman worries her, she can say truly, she has not accepted her son! If the Curate waxes bumptious, her ladyship can say the same to him; and so put the beggar into his boots! If the Earl taxes her with flirting, she can say the same. Even if she were to accept the Curate outright, she dare not acknowledge him openly. It would have

to be a secret betrothal. Not in the German style, where two lovers exhibit themselves publicly, for a year or two, as all but man and wife; and break off, and marry somebody else! Lady Honoria couldn't marry the Curate, unless they both lost their heads, and eloped, or contracted a private marriage. So any way, our purpose is served."

"How, pray?"

"Why, it's quite evident. A serious flirtation under the rose; or a secret engagement, a betrothal; or a clandestine marriage; any one of these entanglements, throws Lady Honoria completely into our power. We learn her secret. We make her pay for keeping it. We levy blackmail on her ladyship. She will pay you—say £200 per annum additional salary, for holding your tongue, and helping to deceive her papa."

"I see that. But suppose she refuses to pay hush-money, and dares me to do my worst."

"Very unlikely."

"But suppose the worst?"

"Why, don't you see, we keep her secret only so long as it pays. It might pay us better to betray her. You've only to hint *that*, to make her tractable."

"And suppose that fails?"

"Why, then, we at once turn round, and transfer our allegiance to the Earl."

"I see."

"Leave me to prepare him; I sound him.

I intimate that I know a secret closely affecting his family honour. Do you doubt that the Earl would come down handsomely? Why, rather than let his daughter marry a penniless curate, his lordship would pay a thousand pounds. We shall make a small fortune out of this affair. Only you play your part. Do your utmost to prevent Lady Honoria seeing the old lady again, or giving up the Curate."

"I see, I see it all. Oh, Aaron! how clever you are!"

"I know a thing or two, Matilda. I wasn't born yesterday. You, I suppose, thought I had no object but gratified revenge, in this flirtation. You never thought of turning it to any practical pecuniary account?"

"Not till you opened my eyes."

"Keep them open. Be true to me."

"Till death."

"Well then, return to Lady Honoria. Worm yourself into her confidence. Don't let her suffer from remorse. Her mind is now full of this interview. She is sure to confide in you, and indirectly, to ask your advice. Give it indirectly. Rouse her. Touch her pride. Hint that the Curate is not altogether caught. That other ladies admire him since he has become a man of the world; to say nothing of the silly fools who adore all curates! Suggest that *he* also may be fond of flirting, and possibly proof against even her ladyship's fascinations. We know, he has

not made an explicit declaration of love. Say, innocently, that it is impossible really to know whether a man means marriage, unless he speaks out. Observe how she takes that! Once make her think the Curate capable of breaking his bonds, she will be afraid of losing him. She will cast to the winds all ideas of prudence until she has brought him to an avowal of love. Then, as I say, unless she discards and breaks with him altogether, we are sure of her, and our game is made."

"I see. How clever you are! I will do all you tell me. Now, good bye."

The confederates embraced, and separated. Miss Minckes returned to the boudoir, to put her lesson in practice, Blackadder remained in the library.

"Yes," he soliloquised, "poor dupe! You will serve my turn. Give *you* my confidence indeed! Yes, just enough to make you a convenient tool, and my willing catpaw. You think I am revenging *you*! You little know why I hate the Curate. Because he is my rival, with the only woman I ever cared for, and who is able to see through me, to a certain extent!" He shook his clenched hand, as he said: "Aye, my beautiful Lady Honoria, some day I will be even with you, for your cold-blooded disdain, and for your daily and hourly humiliation of me. I could not tolerate the life I lead here, but for the anticipation of revenge. You distrust me, and think me dangerous, in spite of your

pride, which tries to despise me. How dangerous I am, you will one day learn. And unless I greatly deceive myself, that day is near at hand. Yes, there is a passion stronger than love, in some minds. I feel it—*Hatred!*”

Although disdaining the idea of making a confidant of Miss Minckes, Lady Honoria could not conceal the revulsion of feeling, caused by Mrs. Weatherall’s visit. Quite unconscious of the extent of Miss Minckes’s knowledge, Lady Honoria found considerable relief in dropping hints, which enabled her indirectly, and (as she fancied) without committing herself, to arrive at the opinion of her Companion. No need to enter into details. Sufficient to say, Miss Minckes thoroughly carried out Blackadder’s instructions. She managed skilfully to alarm Lady Honoria’s pride. Left solely to the impulses of her own heart, Lady Honoria would have accomplished her determination to give up the Curate; to cease inviting him, and to restore him to his fond and anxious mother! Lady Honoria conversed half-an-hour with a woman, in every respect her inferior, and the tool of an unscrupulous villain. That conversation completely altered Lady Honoria’s good resolutions. She was now more than ever, determined to prosecute the adventure.

Lady Honoria was piqued at the idea that she might, after all, be mistaken; that the Curate might have the moral courage, to break

his chain, and dismiss himself. The infatuated young lady resolved to bid defiance to his mother's pleadings and warnings, and to prosecute her flirtation, until matters came to a crisis, by his avowal of love. Nothing short of this, would satisfy the modern lady Nimrod, and mighty man-huntress, that she had really obtained possession of the Curate's heart. What she was to do with it, she had not yet decided. Her future course would depend entirely on circumstances. Surely this is an original novel. No one ever heard of a great personage being influenced by an inferior: or of a lady winning a heart merely from motives of coquetry!

In calling on Lady Honoria, and discovering her heartlessness, Mrs. Weatherall had played her last card. Some mothers would have mentioned this interview. Mrs. Weatherall wisely kept it secret. Within the last two months, she had learned enough of her son's character, to know that such a revelation would be not merely useless—that it would, probably, exasperate him, and so prove actually mischievous. It might cause a breach between mother and son, and throw him wholly, and irrevocably, into Lady Honoria's power. Rendered furious by such interference in his affairs, the Curate was quite capable of resenting it, by leaving his mother's house. Or, if regard for public opinion, prevented such a scandal, they might still occupy the same dwelling, estranged from one another!

In either case, he would be completely at the mercy of his fair enslaver. Now, his mother still exercised some control over him. Wisely, then, Mrs. Weatherall concealed her profitless visit. Lady Honoria, of course, never mentioned it. So the Curate remained in total ignorance, that such an event had occurred! Apparently, his mother's well-meant, but unlucky interference, had only one result. Lady Honoria seemed more than ever bent on retaining her captive. She was kinder than ever to the Curate!

Things went on as usual. The Curate hunted, dined, and flirted. A very pleasant life, if it would but last. Christmas came. Laxington House was full of company. There was a ball. The Curate had learned to dance. He had been seen, after dinner, taking a lesson from Captain Rasper, in the waltz! The Curate did not attempt round dances at the ball, but he figured in several sets of quadrilles. He had Lady Honoria for his partner twice! She told him he must learn to waltz! He said he would; and he did! On hearing of this culmination of the Wild Curate's wickedness, Mr. Gnatstrainer delivered himself of another "commination" at Little Bethel. In this mis-called *prayer*, the Curate was finally delivered over, and declared to be lost, without hope! Whether carried away by "the exuberance of his own verbosity," or expressing his deliberate opinion, the preacher consigned to the lower regions, along with the Curate,

the “ungodly” company at Laxington House, and the whole Church of England! He unconsciously apostrophised these reprobate backsliders, in the words of Aminadab Sleek, in “The Serious Family,” “You are all going to hell.”*

But Mr. Gnatstrainer was premature. Had he waited a few weeks longer, he might have delivered his *Anathema Maranatha*, with far greater effect. For, not satisfied with the ball, Lady Honoria proceeded still further, and actually converted Laxington House, into an imitation of what our Puritans call “the devil’s house.” In a word, Lady Honoria and her friends got up Private Theatricals.

As a matter of course, the Curate must act. Some dim sense of propriety still lingered in that degenerate being. He pleaded hard to be permitted to assist, only as one among the audience. All in vain. Lady Honoria would not hear of the excuse. They could not dispense with one, whose ready wit and learning, would make him the cleverest amateur of the company. As a last resource, the Curate declared he had never acted before. Lady Honoria laughingly replied:—“I never thought you had, except, perhaps, a Latin play, at school or college. The more reason you began now. Acting is surely not worse than hunting, and dancing.” That settled the

* The fanatical preacher of one of our 160 petty peddling sects, actually denounced the Church of England in these very words.

matter. As Cæsar Spry, Esquire, expressed it, "That fixed the Curate's flint. He was a gone coon. He caved in at once." As if to make the Curate's degradation most complete, they decided on a Burlesque! The Curate had been heard to say, with "The Old Playgoer," "I would not sit down at the same table with the writer of a Burlesque."

To write comic tragedies, tragical comedies, and melancholy farces, is bad enough. But to pore over the pages of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, to find food for foolish mirth, is the *ne plus ultra* of literary infamy! The Curate had read these Fathers of the Drama, in the original. The burlesque writer reads only translations of the Greek poets. Of the originals, he knows nothing. His manners have not been softened by the study of the Humanities. But even translations might warn any man of feeling, not to profane such holy ground.

Love of Art, perception of beauty, poetic sentiment, are of course out of the question. There must be a total absence of decency, of ordinary propriety and self-respect, in "*dramatic authors*" who write; in actors who represent; in the licenser who sanctions; and in the audiences, which not merely tolerate, but enjoy miserable parodies and travesties of such masterpieces; such glorious monuments of human genius, as "*Medea*" and "*Alcestis*." Profoundly significant and pathetic, is the self-reproach conveyed in the

dying words of a celebrated comedian and Burlesque actor; "Oh! my poor wasted life!"

Medea, in an access of jealous fury, murders her children, to be revenged on a faithless husband. The old Greek dramatists were not afraid to grapple with such awful instances of human depravity. The deed of blood is not perpetrated on the stage, and never ought to be, in any civilised nation! But the horrified audience—30,000 Athenians—were apprized of it, by hearing the affrighted victims vainly crying for help. "*First son* (within) What shall I do? How fly my mother's hands? *Second son* (within) I know not; dearest brother, we shall die. *Chorus*. Heard you the cry? Heard you the children's voice?" I give this sample of a terrible tragedy, which no educated man, or woman, with average sensibility, could read with dry eyes, even through the imperfect medium of a translation. The burlesque writer, "dramatic author" of the period, turns it into ridicule for money! Consciously, or not, he is paid to destroy the Stage, and deprave popular taste. And he has succeeded. Witness the *botchery* of our French adaptations; and the *butchery* of our scenic representations. Our modern melodramas don't succeed, without murders!

"Alcestis" is a still more exquisite subject for a burlesque! Alcestis, a model of conjugal affection, voluntarily accepts death, and descends to Hades, as a substitute for a

husband, whom she adores. Hercules, touched by the grief of Admetus, rescues her from the grave. A picture illustrating this subject, and representing Hercules grappling with the King of Terrors, was the gem of the Royal Academy Exhibition, some years since. That such a tragedy could be treated as a burlesque, by any one who had heard of the great Sacrifice forming the foundation of Christianity ; who had read the Gospels, or

“ Ever been where bells have knoll'd to Church,”

appears as marvellous as reprehensible. It is a sign of decaying civilisation. Posterity may find it difficult to believe, that the restoration of a human being from the grave, by direct intervention of a God, overcoming Death, could be burlesqued before audiences, professedly believing in so many similar miracles ; *i.e.*, the restoration to life of Jairus' daughter ; the son of the widow of Nain ; the resurrection of Lazarus ; and lastly, that of our Saviour ! *Christian* London is not ashamed to laugh heartily at burlesques on sublime tragedies, which made *Pagan* Athens weep ! This fact, surely, suggests a profound and impressive moral. Let us not refuse the credit justly due to the burlesque writer. To audiences which can laugh at “ *Alcestis*,” he possibly intended to suggest this question : Is it a very amusing anticipation that, in the revolution of centuries, a burlesque writer of a future period, will take similar

liberties with the most solemn mysteries of our creeds, and the most pathetic portions of our religion?

This digression is more apparent, than real. It serves to show how completely the Curate had surrendered his Judgment and Will. Three months before, he would have laughed to scorn, the bare hint that he could possibly, under any conceivable circumstances, assist at a burlesque of "*Alcestis*." Yet this very Burlesque was performed at Iaxington House, before a nominally Christian audience, including the Rector, and several other clergymen. But this was not all. The Curate was not absent. He had not "scuttled" at the eleventh hour. Perhaps he had the grace to throw up his part, and to take a back seat, to hide his shame. No: *horribile dictu!* The Curate was there. He was "all there!" Not among the audience, but among the actors! The Curate played the part of "Admetus," the bereaved husband mourning for his dead wife! The Curate was dressed in a classical robe, fleshings, and sandals. He wore on his head, a modern beaver hat, and affected to smoke a short clay-pipe! No wonder his entrance was greeted with a roar of laughter, which his conscience interpreted as derisive. He also acted "*Cardinal Pandulph*," in a detached act of *King John*, and finished off, in the character of "Tom Noddy."*

* I have seen—not a wild young curate—but a middle-aged clergyman of the Establishment, act all these three parts!

Apparently, Lady Honoria desired to show the complete subjection, if not degradation, of the man who loved her!

The Curate did not dare to tell his mother about his acting. The Rectoress discharged that kind office. Mrs. Weatherall was so angry, that she taxed her son with his offence. The Curate blushed, as he said, "If wrong in me, it was equally wrong in other Christians, lay and clerical, who witnessed the performance."

"You were the only *clerical* performer," said his mother severely. "It is but a poor defence, to say you are not worse than others. A clergyman should set a good example; not sink to the level of nominal Christians. As Bishop Blomfield said: 'A clergyman ought to consider himself always on duty.' And after what I have heard you say against Burlesques, too! I am thankful, I am not of sufficient consequence, to be asked to these grand entertainments. No wonder they laughed at you, dressed up in ridiculous costume, in a Roman toga, a modern hat, and smoking a pipe! I only hope your parishioners won't laugh, the next time they see you in the pulpit! And you acted a *Cardinal*, too, in the second piece. That was bad enough, for a clergyman. But 'Tom Noddy' was the climax! Suppose that, while you were thus playing the fool, you had been sent for, to administer the last rites, to a dying parishioner!"

“You need not go on so at me, Mother! The Rector was there.”

“Since when, have you taken the Rector, for an example? My dear son, it would be better to retire altogether, from the clerical profession, if your heart is no longer in it.”

“I sometimes think so too, Mother,” he replied gloomily. “But what am I to do? If I throw up the Church just now, I may starve, before I can make a living.”

Not the least of poor Mrs. Weatherall's trials, were visits of condolence from friends! None tried her patience so much as the Rector's lady. She called the day after the private theatricals. Mrs. Headlong professed to sympathise with Mrs. Weatherall, and dwelt on the enormity of the Curate's conduct, until the poor woman—between natural desire to defend her son and fear of offending the influential Rectoress—was almost at her wits' end. The Rectoress intimated, that the Curate had now grown so lax in his parochial duty, and seemed so callous to public opinion, that if he did not mend, they must look out for a new Curate. Mrs. Weatherall did not lose her temper, or use unladylike language. She politely, but firmly, said :—“The Rector was welcome to do, as he thought best. If he could get a better Curate, well and good. Her son William need not go a-begging for a curacy. He might have his choice of good curacies; possibly of a good benefice, for that matter! His abilities were well known. He was a

stirring preacher. He had made influential friends! As for his dancing, she did not see any particular harm in that. Doctor Tait, Bishop of London,* had once waltzed with his wife, at a public ball. As for hunting, Mr. Headlong had been a hunting parson, and still attended meetings, though too heavy to follow the hounds! There were still plenty of hunting parsons to countenance William. As for her son performing in private theatricals, she did not approve of it. But he had been pressed to take part in them, and did not like to disappoint his noble and influential friends! If it were wrong in clergymen to act, it was wrong for clergymen to witness acting! There were several clergymen present; and among them, Mr. and Mrs. Headlong! Finally, her son was young. He would grow older and wiser. If he was wild, other people had sons far wilder! And, at least, there was no vice in him!"

It was curious to hear the worthy lady, using, in her son's defence, the very arguments which she had so completely shattered, when used by himself! A true Mother, she allowed no one to find fault with her son, but herself. And there was better diplomacy in this independence, than if she had eaten humble-pie, as the Rectoress wished, and perhaps expected! For her visit had a double motive. To snub the Curate, through his mother, and at the same time, to ascertain whether he was still in

* The late Archbishop of Canterbury.

favour, at Laxington House. Mrs. Weatherall's happy allusions to her son's influential friends, and probable preferment, were not lost upon the Rectoress. She did not even venture to return the parting shot ; though she perfectly understood the allusion to her own son ! The portly lady sailed away, to tell the Rector that, after all, they had better wait and see, before taking any rash step. " Suppose there should be something serious in this flirtation, between Lady Honoria, and the Curate, after all. Men of rank often married nobodies. Ladies of rank had their whims too, and sometimes gratified them. Lady Honoria can do what she pleases with the Earl. Suppose we dismissed our Curate. If there is anything serious between him and Lady Honoria, it is the first step towards making his fortune. She would order her father to give him a benefice, if only to spite us."

" Pshaw ! she can't intend to marry the beggar."

" It's better to be a beggar, than to owe money we can't pay. And he would be a beggar no longer, if he married Lady Honoria. For though she has only £200 a year of her own, the Earl has a good life, and the Curate would get preferment, and can push himself on. He preaches far better than you do. He may become your ecclesiastical superior."

" I should like to ruin him."

" The more fool you ! Don't swear ! Far better make friends with a rising man !

Remember, if you allow your nasty temper to get the upper hand, and do anything to offend Lady Honoria, Henry will never get the reversion of your living."

Mr. Headlong (while declaring Mr. Weatherall's conduct, shameful) decided to bear a little longer, with "the Wild Curate."



CHAPTER III.

A PATRIOT !—A TRAITOR IN THE CAMP !

ONE day early in February, Mr. Blackadder entered the "Crown Inn" at Laxington, with the laudable intention of pumping the Conservative landlord, Harry Bluff, respecting Mr. Stedfast, the intended Candidate. Over a bottle of his own wine, Boniface grew communicative. The worthy "Bung" required no cross-questioning. He gave Blackadder, a great deal of valuable information, which I condense.

"Mr. Blackadder, my service to you, sir. 'Appy to see you sir. Right you are, sir ; it is good wine. Not a 'eadache in a 'ogshead. You ought to be a good judge of wine, sir. The Earl keeps a fust-rate cellar. But he don't keep his wine. Too many friends for that ! Rare hospitality at Laxington House. He lives 'Like a fine old English gentleman.' Do I know Mr. Stedfast ? I rather think I do ! You've come to the right shop for information about Mr. Stedfast. Bless you, Mr. Blackadder, I knowed him when he was an apprentice up in Lunnon. And his feller-apprentice, that man Shifter, that you read of in the papers. Ah, sir ! if I was a book-larned man, I could write the history of both

on'em. I ain't no scholard. But I can spin you a yarn about them Two Apprentices.

"Stedfast was always Conservative. Shifter always Radical, or rather Republican. Twenty-five years ago, they were feller-apprentices. Stedfast steady, slow, sure. Shifter loose, fast, unstable, shifty, like his name. They could not agree in politics. Stedfast read "De Lolme" and other standard authors. He learned to understand the British Constitution. Shifter preferred revolutionary, and Atheistic literature. Stedfast went to Church regular. Shifter attended what he called 'The Hall of Science.' Became a disciple of Carlile, him as preached *morality*, and turned his lawful wife out of doors, and lived with another woman! Shifter didn't go in for solid bound books. He found 'em dry; and read tracks and pamphlets. He was off his chump altogether about politics. He said Britons were slaves. Stedfast believed in Church and State. He feared God, and honoured the Queen. Shifter sneered at loyalty, religion, and everythink. He spoke contemptuously of the Queen, and refused to drink Her Majesty's health. The only time I ever knowed him to refuse to drink! He said there was no freedom under a monarch. He wished to found a Republic, with himself as fust President. I ain't much of a politician, but I heer as they've promised that there post, to Sir Charles Dilke! Shifter said he'd do the Queen's dooty, for a sixth of the Royal

salary, and wouldn't that be a saving to taxpayers! He was very strong on Emigration. If he swayed the nation's destinies, he'd utilise our idle, expensive, and costly fleet, by turning war-ships into transports, to convey the surplus population of our down-trodden toiling millions, to America, and Australia. Stedfast asks coolly: 'Suppose England were invaded in the absence of our fleet? Now, that steam-vessels have replaced sailing ships, we should soon be conquered.' Shifter looked precious silly at first, but he soon recovered, and said: 'Oh! there's no fear of that. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, solidarity of peoples', and Moral Force, will prevent War for the future.' 'Are you sure *Moral Force* is the right name?' asks Stedfast. 'What do you mean?' says Shifter. 'Why, if Carlyle, Hetherington, and those other reformers who have turned their wives out of doors, are leaders, I should call it *Immoral Force*!'

"Each was ambitious in his own way. Stedfast aimed to get above the world, by industry, sobriety, and minding his own business. And nobly has he succeeded! Shifter, jack of all trades and master of none, was bent on reforming mankind, by revolution and bloodshed. His programme was to overturn monarchy, religion, the social and political system; or, as he called 'em, Kingcraft, Priestcraft, and Statecraft! He often wished he'd lived in France, during the

Revolution. ‘And lost your head literally, like thousands of other tools and slaves!’ says Stedfast. Shifter had a hundred schemes for making his fortune. He attempted everything, except the mechanical craft, by which he might have made his bread, and didn’t! He borrowed money right and left, from everybody who would lend, including Stedfast! Shifter was proud of his liabilities, as he called his debts. They were all to be honourably liquidated some day, when the revolution was over, and he was Dictator, or Chancellor of the Exchequer; or, by some sudden popular uprising, Shifter could get temporary possession of the Bank of England! His favourite scheme for getting rid of the National Debt—and his own debts too—was *Repudiation*! The National Creditors ought to forego their claims, like good citizens!

“Shifter had a soul above lapstone and hammer. He said it was shameful that he who was fit to mend constitutions, should be condemned to mend shoes; that a man fashioned for great ends, should be reduced to waxed-ends; and that *measures* theoretically embracing all mankind, should be practically restricted to his customers’ feet! There was something rotten in the state of Denmark, when a man like Shifter remained a *snob*! He hammered the leather viciously, as if smiting a political opponent, and said: ‘You’ll see; I shall not always remain a miserable cobbler!’ ‘I hope not,’ said

Stedfast. 'Why should we not both become shoemakers?' Shifter sneered! He hated his feller-prentice, because he owed him money, and because Stedfast had no faith in, and would not flatter him. A thorough reformer of everything, and everybody, but himself, Shifter could not abide the slightest criticism, contradiction, or opposition. A thorough representative demagogue and republican!

"One day, he tackled his feller-prentice. 'Stedfast, you are a poor, miserable creature. You have no ambition!' 'Yes, I have. I shall be a master shoemaker, before you.' 'You are content to wear the trammels of a false, degraded social system!' 'I am content to stick to a useful and profitable trade. Your vague declamation is the fag-end of one of your speeches at the Hall of Science, or on the stump. Horace says—I've forgotten the Latin, sir. Perhaps you can help me. It signifies our proverb—"The more haste the less speed!"'

"Was it not '*Festina lente?*'"

"The same, sir. Shifter was disgusted at the Latin quotation. His own time was quite taken up, spouting at meetings, and making other apprentices, and working-men discontented. His science was very superficial. Whereas Stedfast never lost a moment, and often, by one word, exposed Shifter's nonsense. 'Crawl through life, your own way. You'll have no luck.' 'I don't expect

it. There's no such thing as luck. You talk like one of your fellow heathens, at the Hall of Science, Shifter! No believer in God, believes in luck, personified by ancient Pagans as Fortune.' 'None but poor superstitious fools believe in God!' retorted Shifter. Well, sir, Stedfast stuck to his business, and prospered. He stocked a small shop, kept it; and it kept him. He took larger premises, rose to be a master, and employer of labour; married, and became a happy husband and father. Shifter neglected his work, and travelled about the country, spouting stale sedition. I say nothing against advocates of real special reforms. But Shifter, as you know, runs a-muck against everything established. He'd pull down everything, and build up nothing. He's got the gift of the gab, and don't care what mischief he does, so long as he's paid for spouting treason and blasphemy.

"Shifter still made a feint of carrying on his trade, and put up a sign, advertising himself as 'Shifter, the Working Man's Friend!' He married a woman he didn't care for, on account of certain savings, he believed her to possess. Of all the queer courtships you ever heard of, his was the queerest. His labours as a political reformer, caused him to attend frequent meetings at public-houses. Shifter took plenty of stimulants, always at the expense of others—his admirers, and partizans. When the pubs

closed, Shifter took his winding way—for he could not walk straight—to the house, where his young woman lodged. Unless very helpless, he generally managed to let himself in with his latch key. He wasn't equal to getting upstairs. But his sweetheart knew where to find him, laying down in the hall, on his back, horizontal, and speechless! It was a funny way of making love. He defended his dissipated habits as amiable eccentricities of genius. He urged that stimulants were necessary to him, and that he could not refuse so many friendly offers. Well, sir, the object of this odd courtship married Shifter, for exactly the same reasons, that he married her. Afterwards, they discovered that each had deceived the other, and mutual compliments passed. They lived a cat-and-dog life. After preaching universal brotherhood, the Working Man's Friend went home, and beat his wife, within an inch of her life! I know for a certainty, that her screams often roused the neighbours, and made them call in the police. I myself have overheard the sergeant ask—'Are you all right, Mrs. Shifter?' The poor woman, terrified by her husband's threats, replied there was nothing the matter. 'Why,' says the sergeant, 'the neighbours says your husband was a-murdering of you.' 'That's because they're blackguards,' says Shifter. I needn't say the marriage turned out ill. The Working Man's Friend, in *theory*, is a reformer of all

abuses ; an advocate of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity ; in *practice*, a drunken scoundrel, a domestic tyrant, who beats and starves his wife ! When I left Lunnon to settle here, I lost sight of Shifter. I've no personal knowledge of his goings on, but I have heard that he deserted his wife and three children, leaving them to die, or go on the parish. They say he's now living in good style, with another woman. Bad as that is, it might be worse. Adultery is bad enough, but not so bad as murdering his wife ! Them's my sentiments. My service to you, sir.

“ And now, sir, if you want to see Hogarth's Industrious and Idle Apprentices come to life again, just look at the position of those two men now. Stedfast has made a handsome fortune. He has branch establishments in Lunnon. He has bought a fine estate near Laxington. And, sir, he deserves his prosperity. He made his money honestly. He spends it like a gentleman. He ain't proud and puffed up, like most men, when they get above the world. Mr. Stedfast ain't ashamed to own an old acquaintance. No, Mr. Blackadder, though he dines at Laxington House, and rides out 'untin' with the Earl, Mr. Stedfast ain't ashamed to come into my kauffee-room, and shake 'ands with me, though I'm only wot they calls a pore Bung ! Aye, sir, and I'm thankful to him for sich condescension, as between man and man ; not merely because he brings

custom to the landlord of 'The Crown' Inn. And when there is a vacancy, there's no man I'd sooner give my vote and interest to, than Cyril Stedfast, Esq.

"And now for the Idle Apprentice. Shifter's a failure, without money, or credit. A political firebrand, a professional demagogue. His only hope of retrieving his waning notoriety, is in revolution. He's like all disappointed, unsuccessful men, who have everything to gain, and nothing to lose, except their lives, and immortal souls. Shifter and that lot, don't care what lies they tell, whom they ruin, and what mischief they do. Shifter has no political, religious, or social principles. He's only a Destructive. And mark my words, sir, he'll never prosper.

"And now, sir, the bottle's empty, and I've no more to say. Good-day to you, sir, and thank you, and hope to see you again soon, Mr. Blackadder."

The Secretary paid for the wine, and departed. No idle curiosity induced him to spend money and time, in drinking with the landlord. Blackadder had gained valuable information. Bluff's description tallied exactly with all the Secretary already knew. Cogitating on his way back to Laxington House, Blackadder concluded the very man for his purpose, was Shifter. How well the landlord described the shallow, blustering, conceited Demagogue, the trader on political ignorance! The key-note to Shifter's policy,

was hatred to all successful, or lucky men. He had no self-knowledge. Yet, in spite of his ignorance and vanity, even Shifter had begun to suspect that he was a failure. He looked back on his past life, and never blamed himself for anything he had done, or left undone. He recognised no blunders, mistakes, errors, sins, or crimes, committed by himself. His conscience was still fast asleep. Of course (like many more disappointed men) he blamed everybody, and every institution for his failure, except Shifter, and the Hall of Science! There, he had learned to believe himself a perfect man, and an unaccredited genius, a modern Solon, or Socrates, with the advantages of the nineteenth century. His egregious self-conceit made him think he had the world at his feet. Now, he was nearing fifty. He had attained neither wealth, nor power, nor consideration; neither place, pelf, nor position. In his own opinion, Shifter deserved all these prizes. Therefore, the whole political, religious, and social structure, must be totally wrong. Down with it all!

Shifter was intensely selfish. He loved no one but himself. But there was one man whom he hated with an unremitting, an irreconcilable hatred—his former fellow apprentice, his old friend and earliest benefactor, whom he used to despise, as a poor, plodding, abject slave. Shifter never could forgive Stedfast, for having succeeded,

where he (Shifter) had failed. He foamed at the mouth, on hearing or reading praises of the prosperous Stedfast. The possibility of Stedfast becoming an M.P. was gall and wormwood to Shifter. For had he not often boasted of what he would do for his poor, humble, jogtrot friend, when he (Shifter) had subverted Throne and Altar; crushed a bloated aristocracy, suppressed the House of Lords, (and perhaps the Commons also), wiped his muddy boots on the wool-sack, and chopped up the Throne for firewood! And now he, the vaunted People's champion, was only a poor, disappointed, played-out demagogue, too insignificant even to sell himself, ignored and despised by the most intelligent of those working classes, whom he had tried to dupe, and deceive. While the slow, but sure, the steady-going Stedfast, had actually outstripped Shifter, not only in wealth and social position, but possibly also in the career of political ambition! Yes, Stedfast was now hand-in-glove, with County magnates, gentlemen, and noblemen. Stedfast might become a candidate to represent the Conservative working-man in Parliament. Shifter thought of the money he still owed his former friend. That was an insult for which he would be revenged! He bided his time. He would pay that debt, with interest, some day!

From his own heart, Blackadder guessed Shifter's intense hatred towards a prosperous friend and benefactor! The Secretary was

quite correct in thinking that Shifter would have rejoiced to ruin Stedfast, and might perhaps have stopped short of murder. Here, the Secretary thought Shifter weak, but respected him for hating, and wishing to ruin, an old friend! Shifter would make an admirable ally, and accomplice. It would be a pleasure to work with such "a good hater."

Next day, Blackadder reminded the Earl, that he had promised to spare his private secretary for a few days, to visit his relations in the North.

"Hum, ha!" said the Earl, "I think I did promise you a short vacation. You have relations?"

"I have, my lord."

"You like to visit them occasionally?"

"I do, my lord."

"Natural and proper. Well, Mr. Blackadder, I suppose I must spare you. How long do you want to absent yourself?"

"A week, my lord."

"A week! What could you possibly do with yourself all that time?"

"My lord, time soon slips away on a visit to relatives."

"Yes, but what should I do without you, for a whole week? Why, everything would be in arrears."

The Secretary inwardly cursed his patron's selfishness, but was pleased to find how necessary he (Blackadder) was considered.

“Very well, then, my lord, I must return earlier—say in four or five days.”

“Make it four, if you can.”

While the Earl believed his Secretary visiting his relatives in the North, Blackadder was spending his brief holiday in London. As the Secretary was engaged on important business, he could hardly be said to be taking a holiday, except, in one sense, that he never enjoyed himself more, than when occupied in serious mischief. When thus employed, hard work he accounted but play.

Blackadder called at the offices of the People's Central Committee for Political Reform! This they proposed to effect, by providing Parliament, with pure, disinterested Patriots, after the Shifter type. Gentlemen without professions, or any ostensible means of living, to distract their attention from politics, place, and pensions; and therefore not merely willing, but ardently anxious, to represent any borough or county, provided all necessary election expenses were defrayed, and the returned member likewise paid! One sees at a glance, that this system is calculated to produce purity of representation! Such members would, of course, have no inducement to sell themselves for the emoluments of office! Such Patriots could never surrender political principles which they did not possess!

The premises occupied by this Patriotic Society, were not imposing or obtrusive, being

indeed hidden away from public view, in a back court, near Fleet Street. The Sub-Editor of the "Liberator" was doing his valuable work, by means of a pot of paste and a pair of scissors. A boy in a paper cap looked on, secretly emulating this severe literary labour. A pot of porter on the counter, showed that the Sub-Editor was not above what Mr. Swiveller calls "a modest quencher."

"Can you tell me," said Blackadder, "where Mr. Shifter lives?"

"What Mr. Shifter?"

"Shifter, the popular Orator, and Working Man's Friend."

"Can I tell you where he lives?"

"Yes; that was my question. I speak plain English. But, of course, if you like to repeat my words, like a parrot, you are quite welcome to do so."

The boy laughed. The Sub-Editor, rather taken aback, hid his face in the porter-pot. After emerging from his temporary eclipse, he drew a long breath, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and seemed inspired with an idea, for he said: "You think yourself precious smart, I suppose; but you didn't ask your question right. Mr. Shifter don't *live* nowheres."

"What! is he dead?" asked Blackadder eagerly.

"Oh, no; he ain't dead, But he don't *live* nowhere. He *lodges* somewheres. You should have asked where does Shifter *lodge*? He aint

rich enough to be a householder — not yet."

"Oh!" said the Secretary, greatly relieved. "Then where does Mr. Shifter lodge?"

"Do you see any green about me?"

"You will be very green, if you don't answer my question. I want to see Mr. Shifter."

"What do you want of him?"

"I want nothing of him. I want to speak with him privately, on business; which I will tell no one else."

"Cause you see, Shifter fights shy of strangers, along o' bein' in temporary difficulties."

"In temporary difficulties! Do you mean he's in gaol?"

"Oh come! none o'that there chaff, you know. He's quite 'spectable—is Shifter. Only bein' a public man, he's very much run after. He don't care to show up to everybody. When I sez difficulties, I means money matters. He always keeps on the right side of the Lawr—does Shifter."

"You thought I might be a creditor, or a sheriff's officer?"

"Well—no offence."

"Oh! no offence. Mr. Shifter owes me nothing. I don't come to injure him—but to do him a service."

"I twig—professional — political — I suppose."

"Will you give me his address—or tell me

where I could hear of him?" Blackadder laid a shilling on the counter.

"For me, guv'nor?" said the boy, making a dart at the money."

"No you don't, Gammy!" said the Sub-Editor, cleverly anticipating him, pocketing the coin, and then addressing Blackadder. "Thank *you* sir, and excuse me takin' liberties. But we're obliged to be a little perticler, with gents we don't know. You'll hear of Mr. Shifter, if you don't see him, at his favourite pub, handy-by, which is 'The Magpie and Stump.'"

"Just the place to be frequented by a stump-orator!" said Blackadder jocularly.

"Right you are, sir," said the Sub-Editor, with a friendly wink. "Gammy, my son, show the gentleman the way to 'The Magpie and Stump.' And if the gentleman gives you a penny, don't you stop to play pitch-and-toss with it, or me and you'll quarrel."

By the aid of "Gammy," Mr. Blackadder arrived at "The Magpie and Stump." It soon appeared that Shifter, like other public men, was not very easy of access.

"Is Mr. Shifter within?" said Blackadder.

The landlord, a big burly man, officiating in his shirt-sleeves, cautiously replied: "What might be your business with him, sir?"

"I want to see him on business—political business."

"Oh!" said the landlord, scrutinising his

visitor's face. "You'll excuse me saying, as anyone can say that. And I don't know your face. It might be a plant, or a do, of some sort. You don't happen to call by appointment, do you?"

"No; I do not. I have come up from the country, especially to see Mr. Shifter. I cannot explain myself further, to anyone else."

"You ain't anyways connected with the lawr, may I ask?"

"No; I'm not."

"Shifter can't abear them liars." So the landlord, in perfect good faith, pronounced the word—lawyers. "You don't come on behalf of his wife?"

"I know nothing about his wife."

The landlord appeared greatly relieved, and said: "No offence, but you see, sir, this is where it is. Shifter's living apart from his wife. Separated years ago, by mutual consent. Incompatibility of temper. In course, Shifter pays her a handsome allowance. He wouldn't do the mean. She has no further claim on him. But Mrs. Shifter's a woman! That's where it is." The landlord nodded his head oracularly, and continued: "Wimmen's different from men. A man separated from his wife, goes off contented, and 'appy, and thinks no more of her. He lives a jolly bachelor. Or if he ain't had experience enough, he takes up with another 'oman. But, onless he's a blasted fool, he don't go

near his fust wife, no more. He don't go spyin', and worretin', and poll-pryin', to see who she's akeepin' company with. If he's a sensible man, she's welcome to 'ave a dozen husbands, for all he cares. Now Shifter's a sensible man, and above vulgar prejudices. Mrs. Shifter ain't. Shifter don't interfere with her. Mrs. Shifter would like to interfere with him. That's where it is. You see, sir?"

"Yes," said Blackadder, interested in a version so different from what he had heard, from the landlord of "The Crown." "But if, as you say, Mr. Shifter allows his wife a fair alimony, she should not interfere with him."

"Just wot I say, sir. But, bless you, Mrs. Shifter is a 'oman, and can't see it, and won't hear reason. Suppose now—only suppose, that Shifter had taken up with another 'oman—younger and better-tempered than his fust wife, and perhaps with a trifle of money. Mind, I don't say he has, I say only suppose. Well, sir, if the fust Mrs. Shifter could find out where the parties lived, she's that vixenish, she'd take the lawr of them, if she could."

"But the law could not touch him, if he had not deserted his wife."

The landlord looked at his visitor, as if after all, he might be a "liar," and said: "That's so. I understand lawr enough for that. Of course, if there was no case, she'd make one. She'd say—indeed I know for a fact, she does

say, Shifter deserted her, and left her, and three kids, to go on the parish. Bless you, sir, she'd say anythink. And if she couldn't get no liar, to take up the case on spec, she'd take it up herself."

"But she could do nothing."

"Couldn't she? You don't know Mrs. Shifter. She could go to the 'ouse, and call names, and cut up rough, and collect a crowd in the street, pretty quick. That's just wot she'd like to do. Now that's annoyin' to any man, and wery injurious to a public man, like Shifter, who lives by his reputation. Now you see, sir, wot I mean, when I sez Mrs. Shifter is a 'oman. You also see, why I'm obligated to be cautious with strangers." Being satisfied that Mr. Blackadder had no claim on Shifter, the landlord said, with an unconscious rhyme :

"Its all right. Its all on the square !
He ain't fur off. Just go in there."

At the same time, pointing with his fat forefinger, to the door of a private parlour.

Mr. Blackadder entered, and found himself alone with the great Shifter ! He was rather an under-sized man, with a lofty forehead, keen eyes, and an intelligent face, showing manifest marks of intemperance. The landlord, having introduced the visitor, and executed an order for "two brandies hot, with," left the gentlemen to their private discussion. Blackadder plunged in *medias res* !

"Mr. Shifter, my name is Blackadder. You are open to contest a borough, or county seat?"

"In course I am, if I see any chance of getting in; provided, of course, all expenses are paid."

"Your London Committee would guarantee that?"

"Yes; if they judge it a good spec; not otherwise."

"Then they would behave liberally, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. We're Liberals by name, and nature."

"The Committee would not only undertake to return you free of expense, but support you liberally, while in Parliament."

"Yes, they would *undertake* to return me free of expense, and support me—until I could support myself!"

"And the agent who put you up to it—Seats in Parliament don't go a begging—what would they give *him*?"

"That all depends on the value of his services, and if they couldn't do the trick without him."

"Suppose, now, I know of a seat, either for borough, or county, about to be vacated suddenly, by the resignation of the Conservative member. That the Tories have their candidate all ready, and count confidently on returning him, without opposition."

“Why, it would be a good job to defeat them.”

“But what would your Committee give me for this information, so that you could at once proceed to counter-work the Tories, get your posters and circulars ready, and all your working machinery in order?”

“What do you expect?”

“My terms are one hundred pounds—fifty, cash down, and the balance, on your being returned.”

“Too stiff!”

“Not a bit! The thing's worth all the money.”

“Well, say one hundred, payable on my being returned.”

“No; I must have half in ready money, or it's no deal.”

“But our Committee may not care to go into the spec. It may not suit. I may not care to stand, and, perhaps, have all my trouble for nothing. Can't you tell me a little more about it, just to let me see if it's worth while?”

“Can't you pump out of me, all you want to know, without paying a sixpence? Perhaps you have time to spare. I haven't. And there are other candidates who will be glad to jump at the chance.”

“Well, don't rile up. I mean honourable. I'm straightforward. But you can't buy a pig in a poke. The Committee won't pay up, unless they know a little more. If you'd tell the name of the borough, or the County?”

"That is, tell you all you want to know. Do you take me for a fool?"

"Then I'm afraid it's no deal. Fifty pounds is a lump of money to give away for doubtful information, which may turn out worthless. I couldn't ask them for it."

"Stay—I might, perhaps, tell you in strict confidence—the name of the Tory candidate, who is morally certain to get the seat, unless you, or some one else, oppose him."

"How does his name concern me?"

"More than you think, Mr. Shifter!"

"Why, do I know him?"

"I think you do."

"Well, then, out with it."

"*Stedfast!*"

The utterance of this name had a marked effect on Shifter.

"*Stedfast!*" he repeated. "You can't mean Cyril Stedfast, the proprietor of those big wholesale shoe-shops? You don't mean him?"

"The very same."

"What?" cried Shifter, smiting the table till the glasses danced, "you don't really mean to tell me that there beggar is setting up his quills, to enter Parliament?"

"I do, and, what's more, he's morally certain to be returned, too."

"Never, by the living jingo, while I live to oppose him!"

"I don't know whether you can keep him out. But I'm sure no one else can, Mr. Shifter."

“Yes, I’m the only man as can do it. But there’s no time to be lost. Harkye, Mr. What’s-your-name, tell us the name of the borough or county, quick?”

“My name is Blackadder. I wasn’t born yesterday. I’ve told you quite enough. Not a word more, till I finger the fifty pounds!”

“I see, you’re not to be done, Mr. Blackadder!” said Shifter, laughing. “Well, there’s no difficulty about the tin, now that I see my way to checkmate that fellow, Stedfast. My hand upon it. You shall have the money.”

Shifter, almost sobered by the startling intelligence, dipped his head and face into a bucket of cold water, “pulled himself together,” and became quite the man of business. With half drunken cunning, he thought he could “best” Blackadder. Shifter suddenly sobered, saw it was useless to attempt it.

“Mr. Blackadder, meet me here to-morrow at this hour, and I will bring the money with me. How will you take it? Cheque, or bank-notes?”

“Neither, if you please. I prefer what *Pio Nono* calls ‘sounding-money.’”

“Well, you shall have it in sovereigns!”

The meeting being arranged, the two men parted. Next day, Blackadder came, punctually to the moment. He found Shifter there before him, with a small bag of gold. Blackadder deliberately counted his fifty pounds, pocketed the money, and then imparted the

stipulated information. He also offered his services to Shifter, to draw up an electioneering address. To this, The Working Man's Friend cheerfully assented, saying: "I can reel it off pretty slick, so far as the gift of the gab, goes. But, I'm no hand with the pen. Besides, you have local information. Mind you give it to Stedfast, and the Tories, hot!"

"Never fear!" said Blackadder.

"And you're a classical scholar, maybe."

"I am."

"Well, then, stick in a bit of Latin. The People likes Latin."

"Look here, Mr. Shifter, I've made a rough draft of an Election Address, which I think, will fetch the yokels, and settle Stedfast's hash. Of course, I shall make it considerably stronger. But this will give you some idea. Shall I read it?"

"Fire away, governor."

Blackadder read the "Address to the Independent Electors of Laxington." Shifter was greatly tickled. He frequently interrupted, with peals of immoderate laughter. When the reading was finished, he exclaimed: "Splendid. Couldn't be better. You can't beat that, Blackadder."

"I'll try. I think I will."

"There is another sov., to help your invention," cried Shifter, throwing the coin on the table. "I don't do things by halves. There is nothing mean about me. If you

beat that there Address, I'll plank down another yellow-boy."

"Mr. Shifter, you are a gentleman."

Both men knew it was a lie. Yet Shifter was pleased with the flattery.

"And now, Blackadder, business being settled; what will you take to drink?"

Over a parting glass, the friends settled all necessary preliminaries. Blackadder undertook to have the Address printed, and published at the proper time, exactly. This would, of course, depend on the plans of the Conservative Party, which he was betraying. He added, "You will hold yourself in readiness, to come down at once, on hearing from me. Everything must be done ostensibly by your Committee and yourself. Of course, I must not appear in the matter at all."

"I'm fly!" said Shifter.

So parted the worthies. Blackadder, bent on deceiving the patron, and party, he pretended to serve! Shifter, determined to defeat, and still further injure his oldest, and best friend! United in mischief, Blackadder and Shifter were already "as thick as thieves."

"'Arcades Ambo,' *id est*—blackguards both!'

CHAPTER IV.

THE CURATE'S FORTUNE TOLD :—THE HUNT.

OTHER guests had long since replaced those introduced to the reader, at Laxington House. Those ladies and gentlemen had all departed. Lord Oddfish and Captain Rasper had betaken themselves to other country quarters. Miss Wildgoose was in town, prosecuting "The Movement for Women:" that is, making an exhibition of herself, on all possible occasions. But Miss Wildgoose had departed triumphantly, and hoping. She believed she had made a deep impression on the Earl, by displaying her knowledge, and eloquence, at every opportunity; in season, and out of season. It was impossible the Earl should not be struck by the contrast between a strong-minded woman, and weak-minded ball-room women. She had received an invitation to return in Spring, to assist at the expected Election victory, to come off early in April.

This exactly suited Miss Wildgoose. She determined to come, and kill, not two, but *three* birds with one stone. 1. She would take a prominent part in the Election, and contribute to Mr. Stedfast's return. 2. Carried away by gratitude, combined with admiration of her transcendent abilities, the Earl would

propose. Or, if he did not, Miss Wildgoose would propose to him, and thus set an excellent example, to down-trodden women! At any rate, she would marry the Earl. 3. As Countess of Laxington, she would make Laxington House, the head-quarters of "The Movement for Women," with herself as first President, or a female Pope! In short, Miss Wildgoose built as grand a castle in the air, as was ever erected by a strong-minded woman!

It was the last meet of the season.

"Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty ;"

had come, and gone.

"For the firstlings of the wild woods
Are too beautiful to last."

Pale primroses were peeping out, and tempting truant schoolboys. Soon would come violets, delighting all, but fox-hunters. According to John Leech, the huntsman called the sweet-smelling flowers "stinking vilets," for puzzling the hounds! The Curate was riding to covert, somewhat mournfully. The hunting-season would end that day. And he had never had the wished-for opportunity, of being alone with Lady Honoria. The Election over, she would depart for the London season, to plunge into pleasure, and, perhaps, forget his existence, in six weeks. *He* would continue to vegetate

in Laxington, never to forget *her* ! And yet, had he any right to complain ? He had never spoken. He had never had manhood enough, to learn his fate from her own lips. To this issue, he would bring his destiny, before sunset. A kind of instinct told him that he had a better chance in the open air, and on horseback, than within doors. He must, however, seize the first opportunity, or lose Lady Honoria for ever ! He was accosted by a tall gipsy-woman.

“Give the poor person something, sir. It will bring you luck.”

A few months back, the Curate would have thought it sinful to have his fortune told ! Now, he stopped his horse, and said ; “You believe in luck. You profess to tell fortunes—to predict the future—for money ? ”

“And don’t you parsons do the same—and for money, too ? You profess to foretell the eternal fortunes of all mankind ; and make a good living out of it. Yet, you grudge us our paltry fees. It’s the old story ; two of a trade never agree ! ”

Some months ago, the Curate would have resented this insult to the Cloth. But the Education of the World had taught him toleration. Looking at him more earnestly, the woman continued :

“I will tell you your fortune, Reverend sir, whether you give me anything, or not.”

“Oh,” said the Curate. “It would be unlucky to depart from established

usage. I must cross your hand with silver, first."

The woman took the tendered shilling, mechanically. She pondered over, and traced the lines in his palm, for some minutes. She then gazed steadily in his face, for the space of a minute, and said :

"First let me tell you of your past. You are in love !" (The Curate started) "With a fair woman. That first love has changed you, made you a new man !"

The woman had said nothing, but what was well known, and what she might have learned from common report. Still, the Curate was influenced, and listened attentively. The Sybil continued :

"You have a very pleasant surprise before you, to-day. You are going to learn something that will make you very happy. Persevere. Fortune favours the brave."

This prophetic utterance chimed in so exactly with the Curate's hopes, that he made no attempt to conceal his pleasure. He put another shilling into the woman's hand, saying : "Time will soon show whether you deceive me, or not."

"Deceive you ! I only tell you what I read here." She still held his *hand*, but looked him full in the *face* !

"Anything else ?"

The woman sighed, and said with a troubled accent : "I have more to tell—that is—I see

more, but whether you will like to hear it, is another matter."

"Let me know the worst."

"Some great trouble is before you,"

The Curate started, and said: "That is vague. Trouble is before us all; sickness, sorrow, our own death, and that of friends—harder to bear. It is a world of care. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards!"

"Now you are canting, Reverend sir."

"Canting! How? What mean you, woman?"

"I mean, man, or rather minister, that you are preaching, out of season. You quite forget our relative positions, at this moment. *I* should speak, and *you* should listen! Besides, you were not speaking from your heart. The world for *you*, is not a world of care, or a vale of tears. It is a bright and beautiful world, and has been so, for five months. It will be brighter than ever to-day—But——" She heaved a deep sigh, and said: "Prepare for a sudden reverse."

"Speak plainly. What is the trouble awaiting me? Or I shall think you deceiving me."

"That I cannot help. I cannot speak plainly. The trouble is dim, vague——"

"Tell me this much:—Is the impending trouble connected with the joy of to-day? Does it concern the same person—the—the fair woman?"

“Yes—I think it does. It will require all your manhood to bear.”

“Shall I succumb? Will it crush me?”

“I know not. I cannot answer that. Stop—let me look once more. There is a *terrible trial*—but *if you can weather it—do not despair—Happiness may be yet in store!*”

More, the woman could not be prevailed on to utter. He pressed another shilling upon her. But neither his liberal reward, nor the promise of more, could draw another word from her.

The Curate rode on, far more impressed with the gipsy's words, than he would have liked to own. The time, however, was too exciting for profound meditation. Arrived at the place of meeting, he soon distinguished the Earl, and his daughter. Whether they remained stationary, or moved amid the crowd, they seemed as if holding an outdoor *levée*. The Earl was mounted on his favourite hunter, Monarch, a stout chestnut, up to the heavy weight he carried. The Earl rode fifteen stone. Lady Honoria also, rode her favourite bright bay mare, Pixie, a beautiful animal, with small head, arched neck, long silky mane, and flowing tail. Her light colour contrasted strongly, with her ladyship's dark green habit. The mare's large eyes added intelligence to her face. She seemed to love her mistress, who, to her credit, be it said, never wore a spur, when she mounted this docile, yet spirited creature. To a close

observer, Lady Honoria appeared somewhat preoccupied. She had a bow, a smile, a word for all acquaintance, but her manner seemed mechanical. Her eye wandered through the throng of horsemen, and dwelt not upon any of the red coats; though some of the pink-wearers were very pretty fellows. But when Lady Honoria recognised Saladin, bearing a gentleman clad in a purple coat, being the clerical compromise between worldly pink, and ecclesiastical black; then, Lady Honoria's eyes brightened. To hide her heightened colour, she bent over, and patted the neck of her beautiful mare.

The Curate rode forward, and paid his respects, with the ease of a man of the world, to the noble M.F.H. and his lovely daughter. Lady Honoria was secretly elated, as she saw the Curate, bowing right and left to County people, repaying courtesy with courtesy, and indifference with indifference. She said to herself:—"How changed! He is able to hold his own, with any of them. *And this is my work!*" This explained the secret of Lady Honoria's preference of the "Wild Curate" in purple, to so many comely wearers of pink.

To ordinary observation, the scarlet horsemen had a more imposing appearance, than the Curate in purple. But in the latter metamorphosed being, Lady Honoria saw her own handiwork! For her sake, he had braved public opinion, Mrs. Grundy, fear of the world, the terrible "Dweller on the Threshold."

He had displayed a moral courage, extremely rare in these degenerate days, when Love teaches a man merely to ride well, and do what he likes to do. What sacrifices do ordinary men make for the women they love, and marry? Generally, none! But for Lady Honoria's sake, the Curate had eaten his words; from a pulpit denouncer, had become a follower of Field-sports; from an anchorite, a man of the world; from a plodding, model curate, a votary of Society!

Lady Honoria had begun, chiefly from a desire of punishing, to be revenged on him, for daring to censure her own, and her papa's favourite pastime. At first, she thought only of exhibiting the Curate in the hunting-field, as a turn-coat, a time-server, a mark for the finger of scorn. Mingled with this motive, was her natural love of flirtation; her desire to make every presentable eligible man, within the sphere of her influence, more or less, her slave. Had the Curate been the mere "flat," or "cure," he at first seemed, the experiment would have been all over. Her object gained, she would have lost all further interest in, and dropped him as suddenly, as she had taken him up. But when, in addition to sound sense, ready wit, and superior learning, he unexpectedly developed "pluck;" Lady Honoria began to respect, and then to like the Curate.

No word of Love had passed between them. But his docility, obedience to every whim, and

manifest devotion to her, began to soften Lady Honoria's heart. Now, she felt by no means certain, that she could let him go! His presence had grown to be a necessity. Four months ago, she was indignant at the bare idea, that he could venture to aspire to her favour. Now, her ladyship's feelings had passed through expectation, wonder, disappointment, pique, and back again to indignation; because the long-expected declaration of love, had not been made!

Curious fact, denoting the sympathy of souls, that the thoughts of Lady Honoria and the Curate, were running in the same direction! They were both fond of Hunting. Still, they could think of *Love*! The two passions, or pursuits, have something in common. Everybody knows how Hunting exhilarates the spirits. Doubtless, conquests are made in the hunting-field, as well as in the drawing-room. Wherever young people of both sexes, mingle, there will be found feelings, warmer than friendship. Some men—even hunting men—are of Thomson's opinion:

“But if the rougher sex by this fierce sport
Is hurried wild, let not such horrid joy
E'er stain the bosom of the British fair.
Far be the spirit of the chase from them!
Uncomely courage, unbeseeming skill;
To spring the fence, to rein the prancing steed;
The cap, the whip, the masculine attire;
In which they roughen to the sense, and all
The winning softness of their sex is lost.”

The tame Curate had actually quoted in his sermon, these lines from Thomson's "Seasons." "The Wild Curate" now recanted in "purple, and fine linen." Looking at the perfect picture of Lady Honoria, on her mare Pixie, the Curate could not think that "The winning softness of their sex is lost."

Lady Honoria was one of those Dianas, who enjoy the sport, and can take a line of their own, across country. From her hunting experience, and knowledge of locality, she could often give a shrewd guess, as to the side of the covert, from which Reynard would break, and which course he would pursue. Her skill in wood-craft, thus enabled her to take up her position, and maintain it in the first flight.

Among the motley modern assemblage at a meet, are many men, who neither care for, nor understand fox-hunting as a science. They take little or no interest, in observing the hounds drawing a covert. And when a fox is found, they want the hounds hustled on at once, to keep him in view, and run into him as soon as possible. If the hounds do not break up their fox within the hour, the sport is voted "slow." What such men like, is not a fox-hunt, but a fox-race. The two things may be, and often are, very different. To the knowing ones, who understand the Science of our National Sport, the charm of a fox-hunt consists, not merely in the burst, the rush, the scamper, the hurry, and confusion; but in watching the trial of speed, and sagacity,

between the fox who runs for his life, and the hounds who run for their dinner. If it were only a race at view, almost any dogs would do. But the instinct, "pluck," and endurance of thorough-bred fox-hounds, are shown not merely in racing, but in tracing the fox; in following him, not by sight only, but by scent, and when, owing to his arts, there is a check, and the hounds are at fault. to see them, hunting about, and recovering the lost trace. This it is which scientific fox-hunters enjoy. And indubitably, this wonderful exhibition of animal instinct, displayed alike by the most cunning of all animals, the Fox, and by the staunchest of all dogs, the Fox-hound, is very interesting. I do not deny the palpable pleasure of a "quick thing;" to run a fox almost at view, and to kill in thirty, or forty minutes. But that is by no means such genuine sport, as patiently to spend several hours, in tracking the wily one through all his arts and tricks. Thus the shortest, are by no means the best fox-hunts. This sport frequently illustrates the proverb, "The more haste, the less speed." Many of the praisers of "quick things," seem to be trying to catch the fox, themselves; to ride over the hounds; and to kill their own horses!

Lady Honoria found a willing pupil in the Curate. He now imbibed eagerly, under her practical tuition, that view of Scientific Fox-Hunting, so well described by "Scrutator."

“Charming morning for sport, Mr. Weatherall,” said her ladyship.

“Charming indeed!” said the Curate, regarding Lady Honoria.

“A southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim a hunting morning.”

“Rather too southerly,” said Squire Hawbuck. “We shall have rain, I fear, before the day’s out.”

“Horrid man, don’t prophesy evil,” said Lady Honoria, shaking her riding-whip at him, in affected anger.

And now, her experienced eye showed that the fox was found, and had probably broken covert; although the huntsman and first whipper-in, were too knowing to halloa him, until he was well away, and the pack out of immediate danger of being trampled on by the fast ones.

Now, the well-known view-halloa is heard, and the whole field is in commotion. Those who mean business, prepare to follow. Lady Honoria and the Curate dash past on their thoroughbreds. The Rector sighs, and shakes his head mournfully, as he turns his horse’s head homewards. Too old, and too heavy, to follow the hounds any longer, he is disgusted that his Curate should do so! His indignation at such clerical misconduct, finds vent in words, and provokes from some hearers, such severe comments as:—“Clear case of sour grapes!”

“The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be!
The devil got well, the devil a monk was he!”

The victim of the day, was an old dog-fox. He had been often hunted, and was so well known to huntsmen, whippers-in, Lady Honoria, and others, that he went by the nickname of “The Patriarch.” One of that large grey species called Greyhound, grown so scarce since the introduction of little French foxes, some fifty years since. The Patriarch broke covert about noon, and then appeared in no hurry to get away. The cool manner in which he sat up on his haunches, and eyed the field, seemed to say, “Do you really mean it? Well, I suppose I must be off. But I’ll cheat you once more.” This vulpine challenge so incensed the huntsman, that he vowed he would handle the Patriarch’s brush that day. For five hours, this veteran managed to outwit the hounds. He took refuge in one covert, after another. There were so many checks, that men who came out merely to ride, and cared nothing about what the hounds were doing, voted the thing slow, and wanted the huntsman to draw for another fox. The huntsman flatly refused to do anything so unsportsmanlike, while any hope remained of handling the Patriarch’s brush. To describe all the incidents of the hunt, or succession of runs, would require one more chapter at least. But perseverance was at length rewarded. The poor old “Patriarch,” at the end of his wiles, and his breath, was at last

run into, and killed, in the presence of four people—the huntsman, first whip, Lady Honoria, and “the Wild Curate.” The carcase was abandoned to the hounds. The brush was transferred by the Curate, to Lady Honoria’s hat.

“Where can they all be?” said Lady Honoria.

“Most of ’em pounded, your la’ship,” said the huntsman. “Your groom ain’t far off. I see him coming across those fields. The rest, I fancy, have taken shelter from the coming storm. By the appearance of that black cloud, we’re in for a regular soaker. Best ride hard, your la’ship, for Farmer Harrow’s—yonder farm-house, half a mile off. I and the hounds will get under cover, in that old shed. And when it holds up a bit, Jones shall ride back to let his lordship know where you are.”

This was the best arrangement, under the circumstances. Lady Honoria and the Curate rode at the best pace of their steeds, wearied by a twenty miles’ run. The farm-house was reached just in time, to avoid the fury of the storm. The farmer’s wife received them hospitably, and ushered them into the kitchen, until a fire could be made in the best room.

“Pray make no apologies, Mrs. Harrow,” said Lady Honoria. “We owe you apologies, for intruding so unceremoniously. Do not treat us as strangers. I love this nice clean

kitchen, with its brick floor, and large old-fashioned chimney, and cheerful wood fire."

Mrs. Harrow would have entertained Lady Honoria, had she been like some great, and small ladies, cold, distant, reserved, or offensively patronising. But under the influence of her ladyship's hearty manner, and unaffected affability, the worthy woman found a real pleasure, in making her visitors comfortable. Having ascertained that Lady Honoria was not really wet, and required no change of clothes, Mrs. Harrow began to press hospitality upon her guests.

"Your la'ship can't think of going, till the rain is all over. Your la'ship must be both tired and hungry, after riding such a distance—twenty miles—and the horses, poor things, must have their feed and rest. Even if it clears, they cannot travel for an hour and a half, or two hours. So, will your la'ship and this young gentleman condescend to say what you would fancy? Some cold meat, and home-brewed, or shall I fry a rasher with some new-laid eggs? Now do, your la'ship, partake of our homely fare."

Even had she not been hungry, Lady Honoria could not have refused the kindly invitation. But after such a long ride, she and the Curate were literally as hungry as hunters. So to Mrs. Harrow's reiterated request, "Now do, your la'ship, do say something," Lady Honoria said :

“Well, Mrs. Harrow, since you are so pressing, I will tell you what I could fancy. A nice cup of tea, and a new-laid egg, and some brown bread, and fresh butter.”

“And can your la’ship really eat such plain fare?”

“Only try me, Mrs. Harrow. I can answer for myself at least, after riding twenty miles.”

“Well, your la’ship shall have eggs laid this morning, by good luck, and butter of my own churning. But you, sir, do let me add a rasher.”

The Curate began to assure Mrs. Harrow, that he preferred Lady Honoria’s choice, but, seeing the farmer’s wife bent on adding a rasher, he desisted. In due time, the worthy woman summoned her guests to her best parlour, a room hung round with hunting prints. For Farmer Harrow followed the hounds. A brisk coal fire burned in the grate. The table was covered with a cloth of fine white damask. The tray contained china cups and saucers, and an old-fashioned silver teapot. The meal consisted of a dish of crisply fried bacon, a brown loaf, fresh butter, new-laid eggs, honey, and preserves. Mrs. Harrow evidently prided herself on the display of her resources, at such short notice. She noted Lady Honoria’s glance of pleasure, at the well appointed table, and, before retiring, with pardonable duplicity said:

“Your la’ship will kindly excuse things

being in the rough, and accept a hearty welcome for all shortcomings."

"Why, Mrs. Harrow, this is more than comfortable. It is luxurious. One would think you had expected us."

Lady Honoria seated herself, and began to pour out the fragrant tea.

"And your la'ship can raally make shift?" said Mrs. Harrow.

"You shall see what havoc I shall make of your brown bread and butter."

"There's the kettle on the hob. Please to ring if your la'ship wants anythink."

And the delighted woman bowed herself out of the room, in the fashion of retiring from Royalty. She kept her face towards Lady Honoria, till the door closed. Lady Honoria might well be hungry, but there was a little diplomacy, in accepting the farmer's hospitality. She would thereby increase her popularity, before the coming election. Her ladyship could canvass for Mr. Stedfast.

As for the Curate, he had never in his life been so happy, as in this unexpected *tête-à-tête* tea-drinking, with the woman whom he adored. He thought Lady Honoria more lovely, presiding over this unpretending meal, than when dispensing hospitality, in her noble father's halls. Novelty, and the association of ideas, impressed the love-sick Curate. Should his dream of Hope ever become reality, and Lady Honoria ever become his wife, would not their

ménage, at least for some time after the honeymoon, somewhat resemble the present scene? Might it not, indeed, be even humbler? The Curate could not help hearing that Lady Honoria had two hundred pounds per annum, in her own right. Perhaps the Curate would have been better pleased, had Lady Honoria been without a penny. It seemed fortunate for him, she was not an heiress, though, on the other hand, it would have been impossible for him to marry, on one hundred and fifty pounds per annum. How glad would he have been to own so good a tenement, as this solid, old-fashioned farmhouse. He glanced shyly at Lady Honoria, drinking her tea, and eating her egg, with unfeigned relish. He wondered if she really possessed domestic tastes?—if she ever could be satisfied with such a humdrum Darby-and-Joan existence, with the man of her choice? Or, were the gaieties of her present fashionable life, actually necessary to her existence? Without them, would she pine and die? Or, more awful still to contemplate, would she become unamiable, cease to love, and to inspire love? She—the mistress of Laxington House—but only while her father lived, unless she gratified his wish, and married her cousin the heir! It seemed strange that the Curate had never met the Honourable Mr. Forrester at Laxington House. Did this prove the truth of the report, that Lady Honoria did not love her cousin? Or, did it prove that the engagement was binding—that the future

Earl was sure of marrying, and thought it quite unnecessary to look after, his cousin?

Such were the Curate's thoughts. ~~What~~ What were those of Lady Honoria? But I am not going to introduce a Love-scene, at the fag end of a chapter.



CHAPTER V.

AN ORIGINAL LOVE-SCENE — A NARROW ESCAPE!

I fear, I have, to use a homely phrase, "put my foot in it," already. Against all the traditional etiquette of Fiction, I have described my lovers, as *hungry*! Yet, to be strictly correct, it has not been shown that Lady Honoria was yet in love. Trembling on the verge, she certainly was. And she must have been indeed a most extraordinary woman, who could continue seeing the Curate almost daily, and (independently of other influence) resist the strong magnetic attractive power, of such a passion as that which consumed him! But suppose both in love! I have already trampled upon precedents. No heroine of mine, shall ever have an unnaturally slim, artificially-contracted waist. Lady Honoria was without this fatal detriment to health and beauty. There can be no real lasting beauty, without health.

Lady Honoria was an Earl's daughter, a lady by birth, and training. She was also a healthy young woman. She could undergo great fatigue, as she had that day proved; having been six hours in the saddle. But she was no heroine of romance. For she could not live on air. Therefore, love, or no love,

she satisfied her appetite. It was strictly according to truth, nature, and common-sense, that our lovers should, after a hard day's run with the hounds, sit down, and partake with relish, of such pure and wholesome food, as tea, eggs, brown bread and butter—even without whitebait. Whether fashionable, or not, such a meal is really more delicate and refined, than a dinner of several courses, of meats and wines. Nature must be supported. Without sustenance, even if they had not fainted, to ride home, would have been impossible. At the same time, the ability to support the fatigues of that memorable day, was doubtless due to the additional strength imparted by Love! Why then should lovers fast?

But after the keen edge of appetite was blunted, the novelty of their position seemed to affect them. They were sitting *tete-à-tete*, in a farm-house. The situation (though brought about in the most natural manner, and wholly without collusion) had an uncanny appearance—something in the style of an elopement! Their conversation became constrained, and at length ceased. The awkward silence was broken by Lady Honoria.

“Come, Mr. Weatherall, this will really never do. We shall not be back in time for dinner, if we do not start at once. Papa will be alarmed. The horses must be quite refreshed. Pray ring the bell.”

The Curate did so. Mrs. Harrow entered,

and said the horses should be got ready, and brought round to the door. Before mounting, Lady Honoria had some private conversation with Mrs. Harrow.

“Our vote and interest for Muster Stedfast? to be sure. That, John will give hearty. Every one speaks well of Muster Stedfast, to say nothing of his being Conservative. I should like to see John takin’ up with them low Radicals.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Harrow. Tell your husband to get as many as he can, and to come early, I think the day is to be the 20th of April. But you’ll see it announced.”

“We’ll do our best, never fear.”

“And now, Mrs. Harrow, we’ve put you to considerable trouble, both for ourselves, and our horses——”

“Bless your ladyship, I wish you often gave me such trouble. What’s this?” she cried, with an utter change of tone, as Lady Honoria tried to force a little paper parcel into her unwilling hand. “Do you offer me money, as if I kept a hinn?”

“Do you think, Mrs. Harrow, I would offer money to *you*? No; this is for the children. You managed to keep them out of hearing, but not altogether out of sight. I caught a glimpse of some dear little white-headed darlings. Give them a little treat. Let them make merry, and remember the day I came here; the last day in the hunting-season.”

Thus mollified, Mrs. Harrow allowed her

hand to be closed on the little parcel. Then, with the Curate's assistance, Lady Honoria mounted. Her ladyship put some silver into the hand of the farm-servant, who brought round the horses. The man acknowledged the gratuity with a broad grin. With a hearty good-bye, and a wave of her hand to the farmer's wife, Lady Honoria rode off, accompanied by her cavalier.

It was past seven, when they left the friendly farm-house. Before they had got half-way on their home journey, daylight was over. The moon was above the horizon. Romantic readers now know what to expect. With all respect for Mr. Gladstone and his *three* courses, two only lay before our equestrians. They might have tried to ride the eighteen miles to Laxington House, at a brisk trot. This course involving the risk of killing their horses, and injuring themselves, might have got them into trouble with worthy Mr. Colam, Secretary to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The horses were tired. Their riders, therefore, humanely pursued the second course. They jogged on slowly, and walked up the hills. This seems the wisest course for mounted travellers after nightfall. But when those travellers are a pair of lovers, a moonlight ride generally leads to an *éclaircissement*. Lady Honoria never spared foxes, and saw "the Patriarch" expire, without a tear. She would have been sorry to distress her favourite mare. And so the lovers rode softly, side

by side, through roads and green lanes. O memorable ride! The moon-lit landscape possessed a mysterious romantic beauty, wanting to the garish day. Possibly, the lovers perceived this. Perhaps not! They may have been thinking too much of one another, to take any particular notice of the night. Nevertheless, some degree of attention to the outer world, was absolutely necessary to find their way.

The Curate was rather silent. He had made a desperate and futile attempt at literary conversation, by asking Lady Honoria if she had read Keats's "Endymion?"

"No; I think not," said Lady Honoria. "He fell in love with the Moon, did he not?"

"It was rather the other way. The Moon, that is Diana, you know, fell in love with him."

"Indeed! I thought Diana never did such foolish things."

"You account love, foolishness, then?" said the Curate. He was getting on famously, according to the French axiom, "Talking of Love, is making Love."

But Lady Honoria did not follow his lead, by answering his question. Either she would not, or could not. She tried to get away from the dangerous subject, by uttering the first nonsense that occurred to her. "There's mischief in the Moon!"

"How can you say so? How should we

ever find our way along these dark roads, without her light?"

"That's true. I am very ungrateful. Don't you think so?"

If the Curate had uttered the words actually trembling on his lips, he would have replied: "I think you faultless!" But he only said: "I have not discovered it yet." Then, he added, abruptly: "Lady Honoria, did you ever have your fortune told?"

"What! by a gipsy?"

"Yes."

"I think not. Why do you ask such an odd question?"

"Because—I had my fortune told to-day, by a gipsy-woman."

"Do you believe in such things? But, of course, you don't. You—a learned clergyman!"

"I don't know. She told me some things about myself, that were perfectly true."

"Which she might easily have learned."

"Perhaps so. Shall I tell you what she told me?"

"If—you—like."

The horses were now walking slowly along a hilly road, through a pine-wood. The Curate began: "She told me that I was in love with—a fair woman—and that my love had changed me—made another man of me."

Lady Honoria was discreetly silent.

"Shall I tell you more, Lady Honoria?"

"If—if—you—please." She could hardly bring out the words.

"The gipsy said I should have a very pleasant surprise to-day."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—and so far, her words have certainly proved true. Have I not been in your society, for hours—and for the last three, *tête-à-tête*? Am I not with you now alone? But she said more. May I tell you?"

Lady Honoria tried to say something about "open confession," but the words were inaudible. She had practically discovered for the first time, the difference between *Flirtation*, and *Love*! The Curate continued:

"She said I should learn something which would make me very happy. And she added, 'Fortune favours the brave.'"

Still, Lady Honoria was silent.

"Lady Honoria, I have been very happy to-day—happier than ever I was in my life—but—shall I confess—I have dared to dream—to hope—to aspire to a still higher happiness. Lady Honoria—will you be angry, if I say in words, what I have long been unable to conceal—what you must have long since perceived?—*Dearest of women—I love you!* Say, Lady Honoria, have I offended? Are you angry with me?"

At that instant, the moon shone out from behind a lofty pine, full on Lady Honoria's face. The Curate closely scanned the lovely features. But, though they were slightly

averted from him, he saw there an expression which was certainly not of anger. Obeying a sudden irresistible impulse, he leaned over, clasped his arms round Lady Honoria, and strained her so tightly in his embrace, that she might have been conscious of the beating of his heart! And then their lips met, in one long burning kiss:

“A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth and love.”

It was all the Curate's fault, that Lady Honoria was embraced and kissed, as she never had been, in her life before. I maintain it was utterly impossible for Lady Honoria, to prevent the Wild Curate's sudden and unexpected *accolade*. She held the reins in her left hand, her riding-wand in her right. She was taken quite by surprise. “The Wild Curate” did not announce his intention of bearing down upon her ladyship, in this practical manner, somewhat after the style of Barkis's courtship, in “David Copperfield.” And even had Lady Honoria been able to resist, it might have seemed good policy not to do so. Suppose “the Wild Curate” had suddenly gone mad. One so desperately in love, is not far from a lunatic. Under all the circumstances, it was wise in Lady Honoria to submit to his embrace, and not to irritate him by resistance. Her conduct might almost form a precedent to other young ladies, under exactly similar circumstances! But afterwards, what should Lady Honoria

have done? Assume an anger she did not feel, and condescend to the vulgarity of boxing "the Wild Curate's" ears? Conduct totally unfitting an Earl's daughter! Spite of her flirtations, Lady Honoria had never before been kissed by any man, except her father, and the Honourable Mr. Forrester; who had taken the cousinly privilege of pressing his contaminated mouth, against her chaste lips! After such a kiss and embrace, as those given by "the Wild Curate," a young lady is not exactly in a position to reason calmly.

"Pardon me, dear Lady Honoria. I thought you swayed in your saddle. I meant only to support you—but the contact thrilled through me—and—and—I forgot myself. Oh, say you are not angry! Say you forgive me. If I thought you seriously offended, I would never forgive myself. I would dismount, and throw myself beneath your horse's feet, that you might trample on me. Am I not your slave?"

All this is nonsense, of course, to all not in love! And so it is nonsense, for Romeo to wish himself a glove upon Juliet's hand, that he might touch her cheek. What else is Love, but a temporary delirium, a delicious lunacy. "A beautiful woman," writes Emerson, "is a picture which drives all beholders, nobly mad." And the moon shone brightly upon this pair of lunatics. Yet somehow—perhaps she was for a time under

the spell—Lady Honoria did not seem to think the Curate's words, nonsense; but such truth, as she had never heard before. For when the Curate stopped his horse, and seemed as if about to suit the action to the word, Lady Honoria laid her hand gently on his arm, to restrain his rashness, and murmured: "All is forgiven, on condition that you do not offend again."

Then, the Curate found his tongue, and (the ice once broken) poured out, rather than spoke, the state of his feelings. Never had Lady Honoria listened to a more pathetic confession of love. She had heard many confessions of never-dying attachments! A few had slightly interested her. Most, not at all. One defect characterised all. They were far too eloquent! Her suitors affected a humility, they did not feel. They protested too much. She could see beneath the veil, that they were proud, and self-possessed, and appeared to demand a return of their love, as a right based on previous flirtation! Instinct told Lady Honoria, that she had never till now, been truly loved. She felt that the Curate was in earnest; was truly humble.

There is a rare experience, which many women of wealth, rank, and fashion, are never privileged to know. Lady Honoria, for the first time, enjoyed this privilege—*of being loved for herself!* Was it wonderful, if she at last, reciprocated such genuine love? If the flame which she had kindled, fed, and fanned,

in the Curate's heart, at length extended to her own? Hitherto, she had been playing with the tender passion, exciting it in others, and hoped to go herself unharmed. But the "fair Vestal" now felt the pangs she had inflicted. And "the imperial votaress" no longer passed on

"In maiden meditation, fancy free."

So it always is. The little God bides his time. He is not to be disdained with impunity. Sooner or later, he masters all. And he takes his revenge most signally, on those who affect to despise him! It is a grand truth that Voltaire inscribed on the pedestal of Cupid's statue:

"Qui que tu sois; Voici ton Maître :
Il l'est ; le fut ; ou le doit être."

"Whoe'er thou art, thy Master see ;
He is, has been, or else will be."

For a time, all distinctions of rank, all worldly conventionalities, were forgotten. The lady and her lover were all-in-all to each other. Lady Honoria yielded to the delicious delirium. Her broken, incoherent words displayed her true feelings. Put into words, they ran thus: "Yes; I know that you love me for myself, and that you would take me without a shilling, which, I believe, is very nearly my pecuniary value. But I am trammelled by my position, my father's wishes, our social rank. You are a gentle-

man. A peer can be no more. But you have not the means of providing for a wife, as my father thinks his daughter must be provided for. If I were only a Miss Forrester—not a peer's only child—or, if you were in better circumstances! These considerations seem, and to a certain extent, are, sordid. Yet we delude ourselves, if we think we can altogether banish them from our lives. Oh! that my hand were as free as my heart *was*, till recently!"

You must not suppose all this said plainly, in so many words, but only intimated. Finally, the Curate drew from Lady Honoria, the enchanting admission, that he was not indifferent to her. She freely forgave him for his boldness. And she begged him not to believe her a flirt, or cold-hearted, because she could not throw to the winds, filial duty and all prudent considerations, and openly betroth herself to him. They must both wait patiently, and see what time might do for them. The Earl was pleased with the Curate, for siding with Mr. Stedfast, and would use his influence to get Mr. Weatherall appointed to a benefice. Lady Honoria did not exactly say, but intimated, that her noble papa might be brought to entertain a proposal for his daughter's hand, from a beneficed clergyman! And the Curate was satisfied with this concession. Perhaps better pleased, than if the lady had protested more. Indeed, he had great reason to be

pleased. It was a kind of secret engagement. It showed how completely Mr. Blackadder had gauged Lady Honoria's character, and all the circumstances of the situation! She had done, from the impulse of the moment, precisely what the artful Secretary had predicted she would do, from cold-blooded calculation!"

This compromise—this clandestine engagement—was ratified, and sealed, by another *accolade* by "the Wild Curate." He either saw, or fancied, that Lady Honoria, overcome by emotion, swayed once more in her saddle. He therefore executed the previous manœuvre, more methodically. He leaned to one side, put his arms round her, and strained her in his embrace! And Lady Honoria—poor helpless creature, again taken by surprise, and hampered by holding the reins and whip—remained in his embrace. And "the Wild Curate" once more pressed his lips to hers, and fancied (but of course it was only a lover's presumption) that he felt a faint pressure in return. Somehow or other (there is really no accounting for such things) the horses stood still for some minutes, and Chaste Diana, Goddess of Hunting—to speak plainly, *The Moon*—looked down on this singular betrothal between a peer's only daughter, and a "wild" Curate. Such a scene could hardly have happened by daylight. The Curate would never have been so bold. The fear of observation would have

prevented him. For a time, the haughty Patrician beauty forgot rank, world, Society, Mrs. Grundy — everything; but that she loved, and was beloved! The Wild Curate forgot the strict notions of clerical duty expected by his Mother, Mrs. Headlong, female parishioners generally, and marriageable young ladies especially; who think Curates should be cold to all but one. Though many said he had long ago forgotten his duty. “Expel nature by violence, yet still she will return!” wrote Horace. In spite of all the restraints, wholesome, and otherwise, imposed by Society, that thoroughly obstinate strong-minded female—*Nature*—will at times assert herself, even in ladies of rank, fashion, and pedigree, and in clergymen.

The lovers now trotted on briskly, to make up for time which they could not consider as *lost*! But the adventures of that memorable evening were not all over. About a mile from Laxington Park, the road, for about half-a-mile, was thickly bordered by trees. It was so dark, that it was necessary to proceed at a foot-pace. Lady Honoria seemed strangely nervous. She said:

“I do wish we were well out of this dark lane. It seems just the spot to meet a lurking footpad.”

“Have no fear——” began the Curate.

“Hark!” she interrupted. “Do you not hear footsteps ahead?”

“It is nothing, I assure you, but the echo

of our horses' footfalls. Believe me, dear Honoria, there is no real danger.

As he spoke, he leaned over towards her again, and passed his left arm round her waist. In doing so, he necessarily lowered himself on the saddle. That movement saved his life! A bullet whizzed directly over his head. Had he been sitting erect, the ball would have entered his brain!

Lady Honoria screamed at the loud report of the pistol.

"Are you safe? Are you wounded?" they mutually cried.

Each assured the other of his and her safety. Neither knew till afterwards, of the narrow escape which the Curate had undergone. Then, apprehension gave way to indignation.

The Curate exclaimed, "Some one ran across the field. I will leap the hedge, and ride him down."

"No, no," cried Lady Honoria, "there may be others. Do not leave me, William! Let us ride on swiftly, and get out of this horrible lane."

It was the best advice. They trotted on through the darkness, and soon emerged from under the baleful shadow, upon an open road, where they could see some distance on both sides. Here they felt comparatively safe, and, pressing their horses into a long slinging trot, entered the Park, and arrived without any further incident at Laxington House.

They passed the outer portal, and while

crossing the court-yard, conversing on the last terrible risk, Lady Honoria asked the Curate to remain for the night at Laxington House. He said truly, nothing would give him greater pleasure, but that his mother would be anxious.

“Ah, yes! you are right to think of your dear mother. And yet, if she knew what had happened, she would thank me for keeping you here all night. I do not understand it. You have an enemy. Think, if that murderous wretch should be lurking about, to intercept you in the Park! Oh!” she exclaimed, “look at your hat!

The Curate took off his hat, and examined it. Then, they both knew how narrowly he had escaped! The would-be assassin’s bullet had punched two clean holes—one through the side, the other through the crown!

“Oh, this is indeed dreadful! Have you no suspicions who has thus attempted your life?”

“None whatever. True; I am not so popular as I was. But I know of no one—not even a theological opponent—who would try to murder me! My worst enemy is Gnatstrainer. I acquit him of *that*!”

“No, it was not Gnatstrainer. He is not your worst enemy. You have a worse enemy than Gnatstrainer!”

“Dear Honoria, you speak confidently. Have you then, any suspicions?”

“I have.”

“May I know of whom?”

"I may be premature—and yet, after to-night's murderous outrage, you have a right to know. You ought to know, and you shall know. The man I suspect is——"

At that moment, there was a ring at the outer gate-bell. The wicket was opened. A man entered, and passed through the courtyard. He bowed in passing. Both at once recognised *Blackadder*! When he was out of sight, Lady Honoria said :

"Now you know whom I suspect. He has endeavoured, by a short cut through the fields, to get home before us; so that, if charged with attempting murder, he could plead an *alibi*. But he is foiled. Did you not notice how surprised, confused, and pale he looked, when he recognised us? My life on it, it was he!"

"Dear Honoria, are you not jumping at a conclusion? The unknown perpetrator of this outrage may have intended to kill *you*—not *me*. He may be some escaped lunatic."

"No, no, dear William. Your life was aimed at—not mine! and the perpetrator was none other than—*Blackadder*! All that I know of his detestable character, fits in with the circumstantial evidence of facts!"

"But Honoria, I never injured him."

"He hates you, I know."

"Well, even if he does (and I remember he answered me most rudely, the first time I dined here), he seems to me, about the last man to put himself within the grasp of the law."

“Would I could believe myself mistaken ! But I know—I feel—I am right ! And now, dearest William, I will detain you no longer from your mother. You may go, but a mounted groom shall accompany you.”

The necessary orders were given. The Curate departed, followed by a groom. Then Lady Honoria gave some very particular directions to the porter of the outer gate.

“You will be sure to execute my orders punctually. On no account let him pass out to-night.”

“Never fear, my lady. I keeps the key myself. Nobody but me can open the gate, and he shall not get through to-night.”

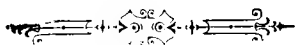
Then Lady Honoria found herself in her father’s arms. In his anxiety at her protracted absence, the Earl was going forth to look for her. She could not restrain hysterical tears.

“What is the matter, love ?” cried the Earl, alarmed. “Has anything happened ? Has anyone dared to insult you ? Has——”

“No, no, papa, It is nothing, I assure you. Only I got nervous, and a little frightened, as we rode through that dark piece of road. That’s all !”

And so father and daughter entered their ancestral halls, to partake of that very late dinner, of which Lady Honoria stood in need, after such a day of physical exhaustion, and

mental excitement. The Earl could not think of dining, without his daughter. And yet Lady Honoria was not hungry. She only trifled with the dishes ; but made a show of eating, not to distress her fond father.



BOOK FOURTH.

THE CURATE'S TABLE LAND OF HAPPINESS.



CHAPTER I.

THE EARL'S UNPLEASANT SURPRISE!—THE HYPOCRITE!

THE time had now arrived for carrying into action, the Conservative plan, or plot. Colonel Cannon had obtained Mr. Speaker's permission to accept the Chiltern Hundreds. The Clerk of the Crown had issued the writ commanding the Sheriff to return a Knight of the Shire, to represent the Laxington division of the County of Sportingshire. And the Sheriff had duly notified that the nomination of the member, or members, would take place at Laxington eight days thence, that is, on the 20th of April.

The Earl was particularly well pleased with Mr. Blackadder. On his return from visiting his relatives, in February, that smart Secretary had resumed his functions, with even more than his usual vigour. In that brief interval of four days, letters had accumulated. For

the Earl was too great a man, to write a legible hand. Correspondents whom he personally favoured (unless experts in hieroglyphics), generally found his letters mostly, or wholly undecipherable. Blackadder soon cleared off the arrears of correspondence. And, in addition to his ordinary daily routine of duty, he "tackled" the extra work of preparing for the Election, as if it afforded him a peculiar pleasure.

The Earl was astonished. He had expected the Secretary to grumble, and possibly to demand extra pay, for extra labour. But Blackadder never even hinted at such a thing. Never had he been so active, and so subservient. He appeared indefatigable. He obeyed with alacrity, seeming to take a positive pleasure, not merely in executing, but in anticipating, his patron's orders and wishes. The Earl confided in this jewel of a Secretary, to make all the necessary arrangements. The Conservative Candidate's Address was already printed. The posters would appear on the 13th instant; and the secret be publicly divulged. On that day, after breakfast, the Earl rode forth, in high good humour. Hitherto, all had gone well. There had been no hitch. He confidently reckoned on the unopposed return of his Candidate. The expectation was natural. For how would it be possible for Liberals or Radicals to provide a candidate? or, if they did so, to organise any effectual opposition, on so short a notice

as one week? The Secretary had kept his promise. The Earl saw Mr. Stedfast's address conspicuously posted throughout Laxington. But the Earl saw something more, which filled his soul with mingled feelings of astonishment, disappointment, indignation, and consternation! Within an hour, the Earl rode into his courtyard, dismounted hastily at the portico, and entered the house; leaving his poor horse in a lather of foam and sweat, trembling violently, and his heaving flanks cruelly lacerated with the spur.

"Hullo!" cried the stableman, who took the horse from the groom, "what's up? The hearl don't usually ride like a mad-man!"

"It means master's in a doose of a temper, and no wonder," said the groom.

Meantime, the Earl had summoned his Secretary, to a private interview in the library, and began at once.

"Mr. Blackadder, there is treachery somewhere!"

"Treachery, my lord, Treachery?"

The Secretary repeated the word, as if he did not know its meaning. He did his "level best" to look innocent, and unconcerned, while facing the Earl's close scrutiny, through a gold-rimmed double eye-glass. Being an accomplished dissembler, and almost always acting a part, Blackadder succeeded tolerably well. But there is something in righteous rage, extremely trying to encounter.

And the arch-hypocrite was by no means at his ease.

“Treachery, did you say, my lord?”

“Yes, sir, I said treachery! I take my morning’s ride, to see the effect of the Conservative Candidate’s Address, and I find——”

“Anything wrong with our posters? I left special orders. If they have not been attended to, I will go at once——”

“Hear me out, sir. Our posters are there, but there are others! Yes, sir, I find the High Street of Laxington—a place which I have always considered almost in the light of my own private borough, and devoted to my interests—well, sir, I find the High Street defiled with vile Radical placards, as large as our own, if not larger, and side by side, printed in large type, so that those who run may read. There, sir, is one of the smaller handbills, actually thrust into my hand, by that ruffian, Gnatstrainer! My first impulse was to tear it into tatters, and throw it into the canting hypocrite’s face. But I restrained myself. On second thoughts, it seemed better policy to bring it here, and show it to you. Read it, sir; read it aloud!”

“Do you really wish me to read this aloud, my lord?”

“Sir, I have already said so. I would learn all the infamy of the traitors!”

The Secretary obeyed. The handbill (which was word for word with the large Radical posters) ran as follows:—

“TO ALL INDEPENDENT ELECTORS OF
LAXINGTON.

“Brother Englishmen! Your liberties are in danger! Your natural enemies, and foes of human happiness, the tyrannical Tories, have sprung a mine under your feet! Your late so-called representative, that hopeless, helpless Imbecile, who has for four long weary years, misrepresented your division of the County of Sportingshire, weighed down by years, but far more, by the consciousness of his own unutterable timeserving baseness, has performed the happy dispatch; anticipated the verdict of posterity, and consigned himself to oblivion, before his death! He has retired to his *otium SINE dignitate*. His reputation stinks in our nostrils. Like the body of the infamous Colonel Chartres, we may say “Here continueth to rot,” the reputation of another Colonel, who never smelt powder in his life, except at a butcherly battue, although in his own eyes a very great *gun*! We name no names. We will not be personal. We detest libel. But note the malignity of this hoary-headed old dotard. His ceasing to misrepresent you, is a positive advantage, for which you have every reason to be thankful. But this loud-sounding empty tin-pot member, could not vacate his seat like a man, a gentleman, an Englishman, a soldier; in a fair, open, straightforward way. He would not give

ample notice, so that all parties might have the same chance, to put forward their respective Candidates. Oh no ! he retired from, as he entered, Parliament, like a creeping venomous reptile, a Tory snake ! Consistent in his career, he has done you all the mischief in his power.

“You perceive at once, the object of this contemptible Tory trick. To steal a march upon you. To prevent you, the People, from expressing your real wishes. The seat is vacated by stealth. A new writ is immediately issued. The nomination is appointed for the 20th, just one week from to-day. Thus, they hoped to deceive and betray you. The Tories have already their creature ready—one in every way fit to succeed their late corrupt nominee. A man (say rather a tool) who sprung from the People, abandons and betrays the People ; a miserable turncoat, and time-server. They hope to return this man—say rather this crawling serpent, without opposition. Such are, ever have been, and ever will be, Tory Tactics. Out upon such hole-and-corner politics ! Fellow countrymen ! Do the men who have hatched this vile plot against your liberties, deserve your confidence ? They have nearly succeeded. They will yet succeed, if you do not act upon this timely warning ! Englishmen ! Will you be content to be transferred like slaves, as in the days of Gatton and Old Sarum, before the Reform Bill ; the days of

Toryism and Corruption, when voters were bribed and made drunk; shut up naked in barns, and carted down like brute beasts, to the poll? I trow not! Yet these were the good old times, and good old doings, which the Tories, would bring back, if they could. Will you become a gazing-stock, a reproach, a bye-word to Freemen throughout the world; even to *Sambo*, who has struck off his own chains? I trow not! You are educated. You are enlightened. It depends on yourselves, whether the Laxington division of the County shall, or shall not, continue to remain, practically, a mere pocket borough of a certain titled Nullity! We name no names. We will not be personal. But it is right you should know the truth. This noble personage is secretly at the bottom of this foul machination, to perpetrate the continued misrepresentation of the County. And we scruple not to inform this lordling, that, by his impudent underhand meddling, he has violated Constitutional law, and rendered himself liable to legal pains and penalties. For the Statute expressly decrees that ‘No lord of parliament, or lord lieutenant of a county, hath any right to interfere in any election of the Commons!’

Fellow countrymen! While Tory enemies were plotting, your true Friends, Radical Patriots, were watching over your interests; counter-plotting to save you from political extinction, and virtual Disfranchisement. For

so long as you tamely record your votes for some worthless minion of the local aristocracy, squirearchy, and parsons, you forfeit your birthright as free and independent Electors. Better not vote at all, than vote to order. Tories try to rivet your chains! Radical Patriots help you to strike them off! The People's Central Committee for Political Reform, has decided to send down from London, a Candidate to contest the Laxington Division of the County, free of all expense! Let the wretched Stedfast tremble, when he reads the name of Shifter! The great Shifter, the People's Friend, and Working Man's Candidate, is coming! Shifter, who never deserted, or betrayed the People; Shifter, the Patriot, the Incorruptible, will be here, in a few hours, to meet the time-serving, truckling turncoat, face to face; to make him hide his head in shame: or if, Tory-like, he has no shame, to beard and expose him at the Hustings. For Shifter is Thorough! He means business. He will win, if possible, and if not, will know the reason why! Be true, then, to yourselves, your families, and to your country. Remember, the eyes of Europe and America are upon you. Oh, that our words could fan the spark of Patriotism in all bosoms! Rally round the great Shifter. Defeat the miserable Tory machinations, and return Shifter at the head of the poll. Return Shifter with such a triumphant majority, as will make your Tory tyrants tremble, and the

seat safe to Radicals for ever ! The Tories have plotted — are now plotting — to sell, deceive, and betray you ! Trust not their honied words. Tories flatter you now, that they may wipe their feet upon you hereafter. Tories have had several months' start in secret intrigues, though they could not publish their Address before to-day, without self-defeat. But cheating never prospers. Tory hypocrites are now unmasked ! They stand out in their true colours. Even now it is not too late ! Cancel their plots. 'Confound their politics, Frustrate their knavish tricks.' England expects that Laxington will do its duty ! Let your brothers in America learn that you have the spirit of your ancestors, who won Magna Charta, political, civil, and religious liberty ; culminating with the Reform Bill, and Borough Household Suffrage. Who founded our American colonies ? The People ! Who lost them ? The Aristocracy ! That glorious Republic rejoiced, when the English people assembled in their thousands, overthrew Hyde Park railings ; threw down the gauntlet, and bid defiance to a bloated aristocracy. Let the friends of Freedom throughout the world, learn that you vindicate a grand principle ; that you prefer Shifter with Liberty, to Stedfast and Slavery ; Shifter with Honesty, to Stedfast with Tory bribery and Corruption. Poll early, and poll often ! *Væ Victis !*

“By Order of the People's Central Committee,
London.

“SAMUEL SHIFTER.”

“ Well, sir, what have you to say concerning this—this insulting, infamous, libellous, and ribald production ? ”

No man was better able to answer the Earl's question, and to give an opinion of this outrageous Address, than Mr. Blackadder. It was perhaps fortunate for him, that he was compelled to read it aloud. For so great was the Earl's fury, especially where he was alluded to as “ a titled Nullity,” denounced as at the bottom of the Tory plot, and threatened as a violator of the Law ; that his powers of scrutiny and observation were proportionately weakened. At length, the Secretary coolly said :—

“ It seems to me, my lord, a poor political squib.”

“ Sir, it is much more ;” exclaimed the Earl, with flashing eyes, the veins in his temples, protruding like whipcord. “ It is a brutally-insulting, but at the same time diabolically-clever, and malignant, Election Address, appealing to the worst passions of our political opponents. In it, I, the Earl of Laxington, am held up to the contempt of my own tenants, clients, party, and the lowest rabble, as a titled nullity ! I am vilified as a secret plotter, and accused of having violated the law ! Sir, is not this abominable ? It's inciting to contempt, and actionable. I will take Mr. Oldstyle's opinion about prosecuting this fellow who signs his name—this precious candidate. He richly deserves two years'

imprisonment. This fellow—what's his name?—Shiftless—must take the responsibility, or give up the real author—the traitor who has betrayed our plans. The miscreant who wrote this atrocious Address, has no fear of God or man before his eyes. He is an Atheist, that's certain, and would stick at nothing—not even murder! He should be caged like a wild beast—and shall be, if I can track him to his lair.”

The Secretary kept his glance fixed on the paper, which fluttered in his hand! Perhaps the Earl was too much excited to notice this circumstance. Nor could he guess how exactly he had described the character of the unknown writer, as an Atheist, and one who would not stick at murder! So that the Secretary (who had turned pale) had time to recover himself.

“Well, Mr. Blackadder, have you nothing to say? What do you think?”

“I think, my lord, that this paltry production is too contemptible to cause you a moment's uneasiness. Intelligent voters will laugh it to scorn.”

“*Intelligent* voters may. But the incarnate fiend who wrote it, knows well, that the majority of voters are unintelligent—‘mostly fools,’ as Carlyle says—and addressed *them*! There is much ignorance in the lower strata.”

“They have no votes, my lord.”

“But they can, and will, influence electors.

This atrocious *thing* will do much mischief. But, what I mean to ask is: how do you account for the intimate and thorough knowledge, it displays of our political tactics? There is treachery in the camp. Who has betrayed us?"

Once more, a calm observer might have seen the paper tremble in the Secretary's hand!

"My lord," said Blackadder, looking up suddenly; "Do you suspect anyone?"

"It is quite evident that some person intimately acquainted with our party-plans, has betrayed us to the enemy!"

"My lord, you know *I* am intimately acquainted with your party-plans. Do you suspect *me*? I ask you, my lord, do you accuse *me* of being a traitor?"

This blunt and unexpected question fairly staggered the Earl. He looked far more uneasy than his Secretary; of whom, indeed, the Earl stood somewhat in awe, as the stronger-minded. Generally, the Earl was not mean. He erred in the other extreme. He was lavish to profusion in his hospitality and amusements. He lived far beyond his income; thereby prospectively injuring his only child, for whom he made no pecuniary provision; and his nephew, the heir-at-law, by burthening the estate, so far as practicable. To make up for this, the Earl sometimes studied economy, by fits and starts, and became "penny-wise, and pound-foolish."

His choice of a Secretary illustrated this weakness. Instead of selecting for this responsible position, a gentleman, with proper testimonials to character, the Earl preferred a candidate without any; and engaged Mr. Blackadder, at half the salary which would otherwise have been paid. The Earl plumed himself on this diplomacy, little suspecting that his cheap Secretary would, in the long run, prove a very dear bargain! The Earl would, sometimes, over his wine, observe: "I saved £150 per annum by engaging Mr. Blackadder."

To the objection that little or nothing was known of that young man's antecedents, the Earl replied: "True! I judged him entirely on his own personal apparent merits, just as I would buy an unwarranted horse—not always the worst bargain. Blackadder writes legibly and quickly. He can get through an immense amount of work, in a given time. He is not altogether a gentleman, not presentable; but, on that very account, humble, unassuming, and less likely to give himself airs above his station. As to *honesty*, why he has been with me now some three years, and he has never robbed me yet!"

This generally silenced further objections. Yet some suspicious people (among others the American gentleman, Mr. Spry), hinted that they did not like the sinister expression in Blackadder's face; that it was just possible the Earl was mistaken in his Secretary, who might

be capable of playing his patron, a very ugly trick. As the reader knows, Lady Honoria had warned her father against the Secretary. But the Earl smiled at these forebodings. He treated them as showing a want of charity, and declared his intention of continuing to trust his Secretary. The Earl thought this magnanimity, while it was only credulity! Men not over-fond of business, defer a great deal to their secretaries. The Earl trusted Blackadder far too much. If, occasionally, suspicions arose, the mere threat of resigning, disarmed them, and kept the Secretary (like many greater men) still in place and power. In such a threat, the Earl saw a proof of conscious honesty indignant at being suspected. He concluded that, if false, his Secretary would not have risked dismissal. This showed Blackadder's great knowledge of human nature generally, and of the Earl's capacity of gullibility. The Earl judged him by what an honourable man would do, on the least suspicion of his integrity. Therefore, the Secretary acted the part of a man of honour, unjustly suspected! On the present occasion, Blackadder determined to play the same bold stroke as before. Possibly this was his wisest plan. The Earl evidently had his suspicions, which might have been strengthened, had the Secretary adopted any other course. At present, the Earl was confounded by the brazen-faced assumption of honesty.

“I—I—have brought no accusation against you, Mr. Blackadder.”

“No direct accusation, my lord, but if you have any suspicions, I would rather resign at once. If you doubt my honour, my integrity, I could not remain——”

“But, sir, some one must have betrayed us.”

“No, my lord, that does not follow.”

“What, sir, how could this precious production have been concocted and published, had not the Radicals discovered prematurely Colonel Cannon’s intention to resign?”

“True ; my lord. The Radicals must have discovered our plans ; but it does not follow that we have been betrayed.”

“I am quite at a loss to understand you. Pray explain your meaning, sir.”

“My lord, a little unguarded gossip, and injudicious confidence, among our own party, may easily have caused all this mischief. Colonel Cannon may incautiously have dropped a hint of his intended resignation—or, more correctly, vacation of his seat—by accepting the Chiltern Hundreds.”

“Sir, he would never have been so criminally foolish. He solemnly promised to keep the secret.”

“And doubtless fully intended to do so ; but, my lord, he is an elderly man. He may have forgotten. Think, my lord ; an elderly gentleman over his wine, might let out a secret, quite unintentionally, even uncon-

sciously. Horace says: '*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*' "

Blackadder's classical learning was another reason for the Earl's unwillingness to part with him. The Earl's Greek and Latin had grown very rusty for want of use. This is frequently the case with many, besides fox-hunters. Of these, the majority indeed cannot well forget, what they have never learned. Yet the Earl was fond of introducing Latin quotations in his correspondence, in his conversation, and in his speeches, both in the Senate, and at Quarter Sessions. His Lordship generally found that such classical quotations told with a force, directly proportionate to the ignorance of the auditors. The Secretary's aptness at quotation, was, therefore, most serviceable, as it enabled the Earl to shine, though with a borrowed light. The Earl got credit for learning which he did not possess. He frequently hinted that he had examined Blackadder in the Classics, and was so well satisfied with his attainments in that branch of learning, that he the more willingly dispensed with testimonials as to character! Perhaps the Earl sincerely regretted that Blackadder was not "presentable;" as, in that case, the Secretary's learning might have been accepted as an additional guarantee for that of his patron.

"You will perceive, my lord, that the slightest hint dropped by Colonel Cannon, or indirectly from him, coming to the ears of

Radical members, or political agents, will quite account for this misfortune ; that is, if it be a misfortune ?”

“How, sir, not a misfortune ! A contested election, instead of returning our own Candidate, unopposed ! Consider the annoyance, worry, ribaldry, insult, mortification, expense, and yes, even the possibility of failure ! I saw a crowd of low people, chuckling over these libellous posters, reading them aloud, and laughing heartily.”

“My lord, I mean this. The very expectation of opposition will rouse up, and unite, all Conservatives. And then, if we should return our candidate, in face of this mean man ; what’s his name ? Shiftless, Shifter—only consider how much more creditable such a victory will be to the Conservative party, than if worthy Mr. Stedfast had merely walked over the course, without any opposition.”

“Upon my honour, there is something in that,” said the Earl, brightening up. “Yes, sir, that is certainly true. Radical journals cannot then say that we are afraid of a contested election, or accuse us of bribery and corruption.”

“And, my lord, if we should return Mr. Stedfast by a crushing majority—as I prophesy we will—why, this vulgarian humbug—Shifter—will get a lesson which he requires and will never forget. Moreover, my lord, the Conservative sentiments of your tenants, of Laxington, and the neighbourhood, will be

so distinctly emphasised, that no Liberal or Radical place-hunter will ever again venture to contest the seat."

The Earl's eyes sparkled. He exclaimed:

"By Jove, Blackadder, you are right. There is a zest in a contested election, totally wanting in an unopposed nomination, and return. It would be capital to give this man—Shifting, Shiftless, Shifter—a lesson which he very much needs; and send him back baffled and beaten, to his Central Committee! It would teach them their mistake, in calling the Earl of Laxington a titled nullity! I have heard of this—*Shifter*. I almost feel as if I should like to confront him personally on the hustings. This is not a mere personal and local conflict, to decide who shall represent the Laxington division of the County. A far greater question is involved; the grand principle of constitutional government *versus* revolution! Eh, Blackadder?"

"My lord, you express my sentiments, with your own eloquence. You fight *pro aris et foris*! Like the war-horse in Job, your eye brightens at the prospect of battle. You show the spirit of your ancient race. Blood will tell. I venture to prophesy victory, though I regret I cannot personally share in it——"

"What do you mean?"

"My lord, you spoke of *Treachery*! I must ask this question. Are you sure, my lord,

that you yourself, have not been indirectly the cause of this unexpected opposition?"

"What do you mean, sir? Do you think I cannot keep my own secret? That I would give the enemy information, which must increase election expenses, and may cause the loss of the seat—information which has resulted in insult to myself? Do you insult my understanding?"

"Certainly not, my lord. I said *indirectly*. But, my lord, have you been judicious in imparting your confidence? May you not have taken too many into your secret?"

The Earl blushed. The Secretary pursued his advantage.

"Your lordship, I presume, introduced Mr. Stedfast to your friends, as the Conservative Candidate, on Colonel Cannon's vacation of the seat? Excuse this question. It would be an impertinence, had not your lordship talked of treachery, and reflected on me."

"Well, Mr. Blackadder, under the circumstances, you have a right to ask the question. I will answer it frankly. I did introduce Mr. Stedfast as the prospective Candidate, in strict confidence, to a select circle of friends."

"Exactly! May I ask, my lord, how many, and who, were let into this important secret?"

"Let me think. It was, if I remember right, at a small family dinner party, early in November."

“Five months ago!”

“Yes. There were present, beside Mr. Stedfast and myself, only three more gentlemen—all trustworthy persons.”

“Do you object to mention them, my lord?”

“No; let me recall their names. Lord Oddfish, Captain Rasper, and Rev. Mr. Weatherall.”

“Indeed! And may I ask—but surely, my lord, the question is superfluous—were any ladies present?”

“No, sir. The communication was not made, till after the ladies had left the dining-room.”

“Now, my lord, kindly reflect. You admit you told this important election secret before three gentlemen after dinner! One of these gentlemen, is a fast military man, the author of popular sporting novels. Another, a clerical magpie——”

“I fear you have a bad opinion of the clergy, Mr. Blackadder.”

“I have, my lord,” answered the Secretary drily. “I speak of men as I find them. And I know this, that if I wanted a piece of intelligence circulated through the parish, I would tell it in confidence, either to an old maid, or to a clergyman. Both are inveterate gossips, utterly unable to keep a secret. I would trust the Curate just as far as I would Miss Straitlace. You, my lord, know how far Lord Oddfish is to be trusted! May I

further ask, my lord, did you sit long over your wine that day?"

"Not longer than usual."

The Earl felt uncomfortable, under his Secretary's cross-questioning.

"Very well, my lord. I presume you drank the newly-proposed Candidate's health?"

"Sir, I believe we did; but what is all this to the purpose?"

"Bear with me but a few moments more, my lord. Then the gentlemen—not, of course, the worse for wine, but just elevated, or exhilarated—joined the ladies——"

"Who care nothing at all about politics."

"Pardon me, my lord, some folks do—I mean, some ladies do. Miss Wildgoose is an inveterate politician, and wants to have women voters and members of Parliament. I have not the honour of the lady's personal acquaintance. But she is a representative woman, and does not hide her light under a bushel. You know, my lord, I do not exaggerate her views."

The Earl knew, to his cost, that his Secretary did not overstate Miss Wildgoose's political views! Had not the Earl been compelled to listen for hours to her exposition of Woman's Wrongs and Rights? Had not Miss Wildgoose wrung from him, his reluctant assent to her returning to Laxington House, expressly to assist at the forthcoming election?

"Now, my lord, how natural that Mr. Stedfast, a man of the People, elated by your

lordship's support, and the hope of being M.P., and the other gentlemen eager to see him returned ;—how natural, I say, that one or more should continue in the drawing-room, the political conversation commenced in the dining-room ! And if the ladies—if one lady—if Miss Wildgoose once suspected the secret, she would never rest, until she had wormed it out of some of the gentlemen. My lord, you know how helpless most gentlemen are, when thus taken in hand by a lady. The victim must tell all she wishes to learn, or else run away, or be downright rude to her. Miss Wildgoose has, as your lordship knows, a great contempt for our sex in general. She regards us simply, as intended to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and paymasters to women. She would not have much trouble with gentlemen after dinner ! Among the three, she would be morally certain to succeed. Some one honourable gentleman might be glad to meet her enquiries half way. One, who though not partial to *water*, would willingly submit to be *pumped*, especially if in that condition nautically described as ‘ half-seas over ! ’ ”

The Earl could not help laughing at this allusion to the condition of Lord Oddfish, at the memorable dinner party. The Secretary had hit the nail on the head. He now proceeded to drive it home.

“ And yet, my lord, you talk of *Treachery* !

Permit me, my lord, to offer you respectfully one piece of advice. Never have recourse to an extreme and far-fetched explanation, when there is a simple one. To me, and I hope to *you* also, my lord, the whole matter is now clear. No necessity to suppose any deliberate treachery, to account for the enemy's knowledge of our plans. Only injudicious confidence reposed in some gentleman, or gentlemen, who can no more keep a secret than a sieve, or the tub of the Danaides can retain water. '*In vino veritas.*' I perceive plainly that the secret has been let out unconsciously by after-dinner gossip. Will your lordship undertake to say that Mr. Stedfast's candidature was not mentioned in the drawing-room after dinner? If a hint was dropped then, or since, by any one of the three gentlemen entrusted with the secret, everything is explained. But your lordship thinks differently. You prefer to place unlimited confidence in Lord Oddfish, Captain Rasper, and Rev. Mr. Weatherall—none at all in me! *They* could not have betrayed confidence even by accident. *I* am a deliberate traitor!"

"Oh!" cried the Earl, "when did I ever make such an accusation?"

"Not in express words, my lord, I admit. But you have glanced at me, and talked of treachery, as though there could be no other solution of the problem. Where mutual confidence is at an end, there can be no further service. Allow me, my lord, to tender most

respectfully, the resignation of my appointment."

"Bless me, Blackadder, you can't take seriously, what I said. I was very angry—smarting under disappointment and insult. I did not reflect. This Radical Address is surely enough to make me angry—is it not?"

"It is, my lord; but a little calm reflection might have exonerated me—an old and trusted servant."

"My dear sir, you have put the matter so plainly before me, that I now wish to retract everything I said on the impulse of the moment."

"My lord, you cannot wonder if my feelings are deeply wounded. Put yourself in my place. I am not a man of rank, like your lordship. My worldly position is humble. I have all the greater reason to be tenacious of my good name, my reputation."

"Blackadder, a gentleman can do no more than apologise. I do express my sincere regret, for having inadvertently wounded your feelings. I was wrong. I spoke under great emotion. I am really sorry. Can I say more?"

"No, my lord, that is sufficient."

And the incomparable actor put his handkerchief to his eyes, to conceal the tears he did not shed! He even managed to counterfeit that audible sob which, performed on the stage, is so efficacious in touching the feelings of an audience; or, in dramatic slang, to "fetch" an audience, and "bring down the

house." If Mr. Blackadder could have acted on the mimic stage, as cleverly as he performed on the real stage of Life, he might have won fame and fortune, and only been hissed as a theatrical villain. This long dialogue, essentially dramatic, shows how completely the villain of my novel, could wind the Earl round his finger. Certainly Blackadder succeeded in "fetching" the Earl. That good-hearted nobleman, angry with himself, drew forth his handkerchief, to hide a tear of sympathy with his wronged Secretary. That injured individual at length recovered himself.

"Do I understand your lordship to express a wish that I should not resign?"

"Certainly. Don't dream of such a thing. Bless me, with a contested election to be decided in a fortnight, what should I do without you? Oh, I see now; you meant resignation, when you prophesied victory in which you could not share"

"I did, my lord; but since you wish me to remain at my post, I shall consider your wish as a royal command."

Independently of sentiment, the Earl had good reason to dread an abrupt, unfriendly parting with Blackadder. The Secretary knew far too much! Had he been dismissed in disgrace, he would, probably, have revenged himself thoroughly, by going over to the enemy's camp, where so cunning and knowing a traitor would have been welcomed with open arms. Such was the Earl's opinion. So

far, he was not mistaken in Blackadder's character. Therefore, the Earl's condescending to apologise to his awful Secretary, though dictated by genuine nobility of feeling, was by no means devoid of policy. We ought to act from the dictates of conscience, at all risk to ourselves, because it is our moral duty to do right; not because it must also always be the best policy in the end! The Earl thought he had been unjust to Blackadder, and really wished him to continue in his office. Such condescension and confidence would have touched the heart of a villain less hardened than Blackadder. But he had no heart, in the generally accepted sense of that word. He had only a force-pump! Thus, the Earl, at this most critical period, continued to repose more confidence than ever, in his most dangerous enemy, because his pretended helper and inmate; who ate his salt and plotted against him!

It will be apparent to thoughtful readers, that the Earl knew nothing of the tragic incident, which caused his daughter's hysterical weeping, on her late return from hunting. It may appear strange that Lady Honoria did not communicate to her father, this strong additional reason for distrusting the Secretary. Yet there were plausible, if not sufficient, reasons for her silence. Lady Honoria seemed satisfied with placing her lover on his guard against his enemy. But, as she had not convinced the Curate of

Blackadder's guilt, she may have decided to wait for irrefragable proofs, before accusing the Secretary of attempted murder! Another consideration must have influenced her. Lady Honoria was firmly convinced that Blackadder had intended to shoot, not her, but her lover, the Curate! She could not explain this to her father, without divulging other secrets relating to herself, Blackadder, and the Curate. Lady Honoria knew, if she confessed all, that Blackadder would not sleep for another night, under the Earl's roof. But it was also more than probable, that the tender relations now existing between herself and "the Wild Curate," would be abruptly terminated! Therefore, her ladyship had for the present, determined to keep her own counsel. But the independent young lady carefully watched the wretch, whom she understood so much better than her own father—that traitor in the camp, that venomous snake in the grass, an assassin in intent, if not in fact—*Blackadder!*

Lady Honoria knew him for an unscrupulous villain. But her pure and lofty mind could not conceive his unutterable baseness. Had she been able to penetrate the depths of that hellish, unregenerated heart; to anticipate the lengths to which his malice could go; Lady Honoria would have thrown herself on her father's breast, and told him all. Had she done so, how much pain and anguish she might have escaped! But then—where would

have been the Story? At least, Lady Honoria had strong motives for concealing the tragic incident, towards the close of her moonlight ride. Whether she acted well, or wisely, the course of events will determine.



CHAPTER II.

SHIFTER'S VILE ELECTION TRICK ! STEDFAST'S SPEECH.

It was the evening previous to the day on which Shifter's Address was placarded in Laxington. About a mile and a half from the village, stood a handsome villa, "in its own grounds," as auctioneers write. Sylvan Manor House was a pretty place. The mansion was almost completely hidden from the road, by tall trees and shrubberies, both in back and front. In summer, the luxuriant foliage so shrouded the house, that it would have eluded observation, but for the Lodge, and the name on the gate. The pleasure grounds, laid out with taste, contained a fish-pond, fed by a purling stream, and spanned by a rustic bridge. Seclusion was further secured by some hundred acres of park land, in which deer were feeding. These particulars were carefully noted by a traveller, a seemingly toil-worn pedestrian. He looked at the name on the gate, and then mused, apparently taking stock of the place. His countenance expressed "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness." He then laughed a hard, sneering, dangerous laugh, and soliloquised :

“So, my old friend has prospered. He hath land and beeves—and deer! The blasted upstart aristocrat! ‘Well, I will be acquainted with him, and it shall go hard, but I will make him a philosopher’s two stones to me; if the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason, in the law of nature, but I may snap at him!’”

This foot traveller was no other than the accomplished Shifter! To serve his purpose, he had stopped at a station about three miles beyond Laxington, and walked the intervening distance. Blackadder had informed him, that he would thus pass the country-house of his former friend, and present rival, Mr. Stedfast. Was it only curiosity to inspect his old friend’s improved position, or a more interested motive, which induced Shifter to trudge along a country road? Shifter, would-be Tribune of the People—Shifter, Republican, Freethinker, and Atheist—never had a motive, which was not interested. Perfectly natural! He laughed at Christians as credulous fools. His own *Rational* faith was in a *She* something without intelligence, called *Nature*, which first formed herself, and then everything else, with some accidental help from eternally-existing Atoms! He had imbibed this faith at the Hall of Science. His brother Infidels thought him almost as learned in Theology, as in Politics! Believing neither in God, nor Immortality, all his wishes were bounded by this life’s narrow horizon. Always bellowing

in public, or private, about others' selfishness, with the grand words, "Patriotism, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," constantly on his lips, Shifter made Number One the centre of all benefits of Reform, or Revolution. An intensely shallow knave, to those who knew, and saw through him, his matchless impudence, ready wit, and "gift of the gab," imposed on many. He scowled upon the Manor, its Lodge, shrubberies, pleasure grounds, and park. His feelings overcame him. He found his Shakespearean travestie insufficient to express his disgust, and broke out in the vernacular :

"Blast him! I should like to burn the house over his head. A blasted flare-up these trees would make! But we must have a revolution fust. And I fear that won't be in my time. I don't want much blood.* But it don't look as if we should have any. Lor' what a chance they missed 'tother day. Pulled down Hyde Park railings, and that was all! To think of a blessed riot like that, so beautifully begun; and then sputtering out, just like that fizgig that Moses fired off, when he frightened the pore credulous run-away Israelite slaves from Egypt. The French would have followed it up, and turned a riot

* These words "I don't want much blood" were actually used by a dissatisfied clergyman of the Church of England! The expression of a disappointed preferment hunter, is surely not too strong for an Atheistic Revolutionary Republican!

into a revolution, as they did in '89 and '30 and '48. As they do about every twenty years or so. But our roughs are pore creatures against the sodgers! And when they got household suffrage, how did the new electors vote? Instead of voting for Uz, who got it for them, the ongrateful fools voted almost unanimously for their Tyrants. Elected nobbs, and blasted Conservatives, and what are worse, pretended Liberals. Wouldn't even have a Radical on the School Board. "Pah!" He spat on the ground in disgust, and continued: "Sich ingratitude is enough to make a feller turn his coat. I'd do it fast enough to spite 'em, if I thought I could get anythink by it that would pay better than my present line of business. But what government would give anything to Shifter, the Radical, the Republican, the Atheist, the teacher of revolution, rebellion and sedition? I sometimes begin to think that I've overshot the mark. However it's too late now to change. Must go on with the old patter, right or wrong." Having thus relieved his feelings on abstract politics, he became more practical: "I wonder if the bloke's at home. I should like to see him."

The Working Man's Friend was more fortunate than he deserved to be. Just then, Mr. Stedfast appeared in the avenue. Shifter recognised him in a moment. Approaching the gate, Shifter said in true mendicant whine:

"Pity a pore, weary, footsore traveller."

"Have you come far?" said Mr. Stedfast.

"Been on the tramp the whole bloomin' day, and never tasted bit nor sup. Precious hard lines for a cove. But you gentlemen of Hengland who live at home at ease, Ah, little do you think upon the dangers of the seas."

"What! are you a sailor?"

"Yes, sir—no sir,—I didn't mean that. I mean you rich people cannot sympathise with pore folks. Do you never think of the text, 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.'"

"What, are you a field preacher?"

"Yes sir, something in that way. I do a considerable deal of preaching, when I can get an audience."

"An audience! You should say a congregation. You speak more like a play actor, than a preacher. What will you call yourself next? Come, can't you think of some other trade?"

"Ah, sir, you look like a man of the world. Have you no sympathy for your fellow-man? Burns says 'A man's a man for a' that.' Bnt you've got no heart."

"I'm what you tramps call 'gammy,' then. At least you shall find I have a *head*, and know when I'm imposed on. Anyone can tell a pitiful story. But you don't seem quite

perfect in yours. How many miles have you walked ? ”

“ Been on the tramp all day.”

“ Aye, so you said before. Where did you sleep last night ? Which road have you come ? ”

Shifter looked blank at these unexpected questions. He was at a loss to answer them. He whined out :

“ Lor’ sir, how distrustful you be. I’m both ’ungry and thirsty.”

“ Of course, that follows, if you walked all day without eating and drinking, as you say.”

“ Well, sir, if you’re so hard-hearted you won’t give a pore cove nothink, perhaps you’ll tell me how far it is to the next public—maybe they’ll give me a mug of beer, not bein’ *gentlefolks* ! ”

“ I wonder you didn’t ask at the public-house, you must have passed, just half-a-mile from here.”

“ I didn’t see none.”

“ Did you find the roads dusty ? ”

“ Precious dusty, sir. That’s what makes me so dry.”

“ Singular that your shoes show so little dust, after a long day’s tramp. Almost as odd as that you don’t know where you slept last night ; how many miles you have come, nor by what road ! Why, if you had only walked from the railway station, you could not have cleaner shoes. It strikes me you are an impostor ! ”

Instead of sheering off, as Mr. Stedfast expected, the pretended "tramp" burst into laughter, long and loud. The man's cool impudence fairly staggered Mr. Stedfast. He knew not what to think. As soon as Shifter could speak, he said :

"Ha, ha, there's no deceiving you, Cyril Stedfast. You are right. Yes, I am in one sense, an impostor—not a stranger."

"How! you know my name, and your voice sounds familiarly. Bless me, is it possible, can you really be my old fellow apprentice, Samuel Shifter?"

"The same—I'm glad to find you're not too proud to own me."

"Proud! Pshaw! give me your hand, old friend, for the sake of auld lang syne. Come in, and take refreshment, and talk over old times."

"Why that's hearty—and 'most overcomes me." The dissembler put up his handkerchief to hide his *dry* eyes! "I do believe you are glad to see me."

"I am indeed."

"Yet you are *rich*. I am *pore*."

"No more of that"

"Let me go on, Cyril. I ain't fit company for you now." For once, Shifter spoke an undoubted truth. He certainly was not fit company for Stedfast, or any other honest man.

But Stedfast, conceiving him to be really humble, was deeply touched, and replied:

“You should know me better. My old fellow-apprentice shall never pass my door, without partaking of my hospitality. Come in.”

After shamming reluctance, Shifter apparently yielded only to his friend's persuasions. The Working Man's Friend went in, and partook of Stedfast's hospitality, on a perfect footing of equality. Many gentlemen knowing even less of Shifter's career than Stedfast did, would with perfect propriety, have declined to renew the acquaintance of their youth, especially when Shifter was masquerading as a tramp! Stedfast's spontaneous recognition and hearty welcome, would have affected most men. Stedfast's kindness and hospitality, actually intensified Shifter's hatred! Yes; even while reclining in a comfortable arm-chair, in the dining-room, partaking of a cold collation, eating of a venison pasty, and pledging his host in champagne, Shifter still hated Stedfast! The Republican Atheist, whilst mouthing about universal brotherhood, went home, half-murdered his wife; and coveted the opportunity to saturate the guillotine with the blood of his “enemies,” as he called his political and theological opponents. The foul-mouthed philanthropist in theory, practically hated his fellow-men in general, and especially detested his old friend and benefactor, to whom he owed money; and who now entertained him on a footing of equality, where ninety-nine men in a hundred, would

have ignored him ! Shifter thoroughly illustrated that corruption of human nature, which he publicly denied, as the invention of priestcraft !

Shifter satiated his appetite, and more than quenched his thirst. He ate and drank, till he could eat and drink no more, without losing his habitual cunning. He therefore laid down his knife and fork, and merely sipped his wine. Then the former "chums" conversed. Stedfast was not inquisitive, and did not pry into his old friend's affairs. But Shifter had previously concocted a *story*, to account for his unexpected presence in that part of the country. He now told his artful tale, with a plausibility, which might have deceived a more suspicious man than Stedfast. Shifter said he had come down to receive a debt due to him. He had been unhappily disappointed. He had trusted faithfully to his debtor's promise, and consequently had not money enough to pay his fare back to London. This he did not much mind on his own account. He could tramp, and beg his way back. But he had confidently reckoned on receiving the money, that he might pay both principal and interest of the long-standing debt due to his fellow apprentice.

"And this was your errand to Laxington, Samuel ?"

"It was, Cyril."

"God bless you, Samuel ! I take the will for the deed. I have long since ruled out

that debt, which you know is legally irrecoverable."

"I know that, Cyril; I always considered it as a debt of honour, and meant to pay it."

"I'm more pleased to hear you say that, Samuel, than if you had paid me the debt, principal and interest, twice over. It raises my opinion of human nature. Pope says, 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.' I don't mind telling you I have heard bad stories about you."

"Lies, Cyril, Lies! Every public man is talked of, and misrepresented more or less."

"Well, Samuel, I believe your heart's in the right place. Say no more about the debt, freely cancelled long ago. Here are ten sovereigns to bear your expenses back to London. And if you want more help, apply to me."

"Oh! Cyril, you are too good. I see the world has not spoiled you." And Shifter once more concealed his *dry* eyes in his pocket-handkerchief. "You are a trump, and no mistake. A friend in need's a friend indeed. I can't take your money."

"You'll offend me if you refuse."

"Well then, I'll take it, but only as a loan, I'll return it, honour bright."

"Take it as a gift, or loan, any way you like;—only take it."

Shifter did take it. He did more. By a lucky after-thought, he enlarged upon the frightful destitution of his wife and children.

This was true enough. But Shifter did not mention that he had deserted his lawful wife and children, and contributed not a penny to their support, while living in luxury, under a feigned name, with another woman! Stedfast was so moved by the affecting narrative, that he added twenty-pounds more, to the ten already given. He at first proposed to write a cheque. But Shifter reckoned that the morrow's Election-news would cause a cheque, or bank-notes, to be stopped. He therefore requested to have the sum in sounding money, and got it in specie!

Shifter then took himself off. Stedfast accompanied him half-a-mile towards Laxington. Stedfast wished to go all the way. This, Shifter prudently declined, alleging as a reason, that he was too shabbily dressed to be seen walking alongside a country gentleman.

"God be with you, old friend," said Stedfast, cordially shaking hands at parting. His voice was husky. There were tears in his eyes. He turned more than once, to wave an adieu. Shifter kept up the farce of feeling, looked after Stedfast, till out of sight, and then deliberately shook his fist, and uttered a fearful imprecation.

"The heart of man is deceitful, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" To this vile perverted nature, further obligations only added fuel to the fire of hatred! Yet even Shifter tried to deceive himself, and

to fancy that he hated Stedfast, not because the latter had added to previous obligations; but because he had in some way insulted him, by not introducing him, Shifter, the People's Friend, to Mrs. Stedfast and family.

"The blasted proud upstart thinks me not good enough to know his wife and children. I'll be even with you for this to-morrow; see if I don't. He called me an impostor. He wasn't far out there. A nice election trick I played him. And cleverly I pumped him, while he boasted of his nomination to-morrow as sole Candidate, and talked of his return as a mere matter of course. And yet I ought to have got more money out of the precious flat."

So, the Monster walked on, chuckling to himself, at the anticipation of Stedfast's long face, when he should see his (Shifter's) Address to-morrow. The poor rogue thought he had done a very clever thing, in deceiving, cheating, swindling his noble, generous, trusting friend. Whereas, the real fool was not Stedfast, but Shifter! He did not know that "All wickedness is folly." The slightest particle of self-knowledge, would have awaked the voice of conscience. And the self-satisfied Atheist, walking with head erect, would have grovelled in the dust, and cried: "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

On the morrow, the Addresses of both candidates appeared. Never had there been such commotion in Laxington, within the

memory of the oldest inhabitant! The Conservatives, were astonished, and mortified. But they recovered themselves. After all, the trick was fair. They had tried to steal a march on their political opponents, in a bye-election; had provoked reprisals; and were not to have it all their own way. The Conservatives must work to bring in their man. The inn-keepers and publicans were especially pleased. More accommodation for man and horse, more committee-rooms would be required. And much more wine, beer, and spirits would be drunk, during a contested election, than with a single candidate.

As already seen, the Earl had a most unpleasant surprise. But a still more unpleasant surprise startled Mr. Stedfast, when, riding into Laxington, he read the Radical Address; and saw that he had been doubly imposed on! He felt, with keen intensity, very natural indignation at being duped, joined to that feeling of Pity which all noble natures feel, at every fresh instance of man's natural depravity! The money he could spare. But to have his new-born faith in Shifter's honesty thus destroyed, was too much for Stedfast's equanimity. To crown all, at this moment, Shifter appeared surrounded by some enthusiastic supporters. Perfectly unabashed, the Working Man's Friend came up, and held out his hand to the Conservative Candidate. Stedfast was fairly astounded at such incredible impu-

dence. He was literally struck dumb. Shifter saw his advantage, and improved the opportunity. He struck an attitude, and commenced an Election Address, speaking at his opponent :

“What did I tell you, gentlemen? Did I not prophesy that the Tory Candidate would not acknowledge my courtesy?” (Cries of ‘Yes, you did’) “I did not wait for him to speak fust. I came up to him. I took off my hat. I offered my ‘and. You see he refuses my ‘and—the ‘and of a h’honest man—and of a h’honest rival. He, the up-start, the *parvenu*, the successful tradesman, refuses the ‘and of a pore man. He makes no sign of acknowledgment. He treats me like a dog. Yet, would you believe it, gentlemen? He and I were once fellow-apprentices, and sat side-by-side, working at the same trade!” (Cries of ‘Shame! Shame!’) “Well, all I can say is, I wanted to fight this battle courteously. The Conservative Candidate won’t forgive me for opposing him. This is the Tory fair play, and generosity, and gentlemanly conduct, we hear so much about. Well, I’m thankful I’m only a man of the People.”

This speech made a most powerful impression. It seemed impossible to dispute its truth. The Radical audience forgot the gross insults to Stedfast, in Shifter’s printed Address. They saw that Stedfast refused Shifter’s hand. The crowd cheered Shifter; hissed, hooted, and groaned at Stedfast. They even threat-

ened him with personal violence ; and followed him some distance along the High Street, shouting "Aristocrat ! Aristocrat !" Even Conservatives who rallied round Stedfast, to protect him, blamed him for not reciprocating his rival's courtesy, and said Stedfast had not acted like himself !

Mr. Stedfast took refuge in "The Crown Inn," and ordered a bottle of wine, of which he and two friends were really in need. Harry Bluff, the landlord, brought the bottle and glasses into the coffee-room, and said : "Excuse me, Mr. Stedfast, and gentlemen, but I hope you won't let them ragamuffins distress you. I can't think what makes 'em so abominably rude. To go for to hustle a gentleman like Mr. Stedfast ! I guess it's all along of that there Shifter. Don't you take it so much to heart, Mr. Stedfast, sir, or you won't be able to fight and win. Just you pull yourself together. Excuse me makin' so free, sir."

The sharp contrast between Shifter's ingratitude, and the worthy landlord's honest sympathy, fairly overpowered Stedfast. He replied : "Thanks, Bluff. I don't mind fair opposition. Don't think me mean enough to be offended with Shifter for opposing me. It's not that."

Then he relieved his feelings, by telling his two friends, and the landlord, the whole of Shifter's conduct. Honest Boniface was indignant. He frequently interrupted the narration, by pounding the table, the wall,

and his own breast, with his clenched hand. He signalled the close of the communication, by springing to his feet, and going through an imaginary prize-fight. This he was well able to do, having been a noted bruiser in his youth and prime. Even now, fat and puffy as he was, gentlemen of the Fancy would have greatly admired the knowing manner, in which he went through the various motions of attack and defence, symbolising a "mill." He duly "went in with left," "tapped the claret," hit alternately on the "conk," the "kisser," the "nut," and "damaged the day-lights" of a visionary opponent. At last, Bluff finished the performance, by striking the coffee-room door with such tremendous force, that he sent his brawny arm up to the elbow through the panel! He then subsided, looked at his knuckles streaming blood, fetched his breath, and said:—

"There, gentlemen! that's the way I'll serve out that damned rascal Shifter, if he dares to show his ugly mug inside 'The Crown Inn.' I never thought much of Shifter, but I didn't think him such a mean blackguard, as to treat you, Mr. Stedfast, of all men, with such base ingratitude. If any-one else had told me what you have, sir, I couldn't have believed it. Well, Shifter shall hear of this, or my name's not Harry Bluff. Cheating never prospers. I'll lay ten to one, he'll lose the Election after all."

It seemed as if honest "Bung" had

prophesied truly. All respectable electors were disgusted at the insults which Shifter's Address heaped upon Stedfast, and at the personal violence offered to so worthy a man. During the week, there was a marked reaction from the effect first produced by Shifter's audacious policy. Stedfast's colours were blue, Shifter's red—the true Republican colour. The betting was two to one, in favour of Stedfast, a man personally known and popular; against Shifter, notorious as a political firebrand and agitator. Nevertheless, people were eager to see and hear him. And upon the nomination day, there appeared just that element of uncertainty, calculated to give an additional zest and flavour to the proceedings. Even the Conservatives were not sorry to have an opponent of so marked a Radical type. It made the contest one of principles—not of petty local interests. The question was;—how would middle class Libera's go? Would they give a party vote for the Radical, or be true to higher political principles—love for the Constitution—and vote for the Conservative Candidate? Much, of course, would depend on the speeches of the Candidates. Readers will bear in mind, that this was an old-fashioned election, previously to Vote by Ballot becoming law.

The eventful day had arrived. A great crowd had assembled round the hustings, erected in the market-place. The windows

of an adjoining house (whence proceedings could be seen and heard) were occupied by Lady Honoria and party, comprising her lady guests of last November. For the present, Miss Wildgoose condescended to remain among these friends of her own sex, who had assembled more out of curiosity to watch her triumph, or failure, than to study the humours of an election. Mr. Stedfast appeared, supported by the Earl of Laxington,* and some of the most influential gentlemen of the neighbourhood. Lord Oddfish and Captain Rasper were also present. Shifter's *suite* was also numerous, though less select. Among other respectable tradesmen, appeared Mr. Gnatstrainer. The space in front of, and surrounding the hustings, was filled with a vast crowd, comprising electors and non-electors. The latter were generally distinguished from the former, by being dirtier, noisier, and thirstier. Non-electors proved beyond a doubt that if they could not vote, they could shout, shove, interrupt, and drink an unlimited quantity of ale, at other people's expense. The Candidates were duly cheered by their supporters, and hooted by their opponents. The Conservative and Radical mobs then entered into an amiable rivalry,

* "No lord of Parliament, or lord lieutenant of a county, hath any right to interfere in any election of the commons." (Price's Manual.) If this law has not been abrogated, it is continually set at nought. Some time since I attended a Conservative election meeting, at which an Earl presided as chairman!

as to which could outbellow the other. This contest at length ended, partly from want of breath, partly from curiosity. And the day's business was allowed to proceed. The usual preliminaries over, speech-making commenced. The crowd, at first unruly, on discovering that the Conservative Candidate was not a "duffer" and could "spout," gave him a fair hearing. Mr. Stedfast dealt with principles. This summary of his speech is in answer to the question,

WHY AM I A CONSERVATIVE ?

"Friends ! there was once a donkey, placed between two bundles of hay, so exactly alike in quantity and quality, that he could not decide which to prefer. Both bundles appealed with perfectly equal force, to the donkey's sight and smell. Both bundles were equally attractive. The poor animal's will was completely puzzled ; his power of action practically paralysed. He glanced from one bundle to the other, but he never could make up his mind which to eat first. So he ate neither, and at last actually dropped down, and died of hunger, starved to death between two bundles of hay"—Here there was much laughter, which was greatly increased by a stolid farmer saying :—"I doant believe that story." The Candidate continued—"Friends ! you don't believe that story. Neither do I. There is no donkey so stupid, as to starve to death, between two bundles of hay. Why

did I tell it? Because there are men politically more stupid than donkeys. I mean householders who never vote, because they never can make up their minds which party to prefer. Such householders actually disfranchise themselves. They are miscalled voters. For they do not vote. Politically, they starve themselves. They fail in their duty to their country. Every elector should use his vote." (Cheers.)

"Friends! I propose a short and easy method, by which every man can determine his political allegiance. I give you briefly the reasons which make me a Conservative. Do you love your Queen, your Country, the British Constitution, the envy of all nations, the freest polity ever achieved, in ancient or modern times? Do you wish to preserve the Throne, the House of Lords, the Church; and to avoid revolution? Do you prefer peace, to foreign and civil war? Do you wish Great Britain to retain her ancient proper place, foremost in the councils of Europe? Do you desire to maintain, intact, our Empire girdling the globe, India, and our Colonies? Do you wish Ireland to remain an integral portion of the United Kingdom? All who say *Yes*, to these questions, will vote for me! All who say *No*, will vote for the Radical Candidate." (Cheers! Counter-cheers!)

"But Liberals say, indignantly: *They* are lovers of the Constitution. *They* would preserve the integrity of the Empire. *They* do

not acknowledge any superiors in Patriotism. They tell you, you can say *yes* to all my questions, and still be Liberals. You may, in *theory*—not in *practice*. There are Liberals—and Liberals. Some are loyal to the Constitution. But note the difference. Here and there, you find a loyal Constitutional Liberal, a *rara avis*! All Conservatives are, and must be, fondly attached to the three estates of the Realm. I am a Conservative. If I told you no more, you would know at once my fundamental political principles. Whereas, a Liberal may be a Constitutionalist, or a subverter of the Constitution. The name Liberal is wonderfully elastic. It pledges its professors to nothing definite. You must catechise a Liberal, to find out what his principles are. Liberalism contains all shades of political opinion. Constitutional Liberals cast in their lot with Radicals, Republicans, avowed enemies of the Constitution, with *lovers* of *Liberty*, who sympathise with despotic Russia; with *Imperialists*, pledged to dismember the Empire, to repeal the Union, to abandon India and the Colonies! Liberalism has no distinctive opinions; or it cannot define them. It cannot control its own party. Conservatism offers—what Liberalism cannot offer—a distinctive policy, a guarantee of Loyalty. Will you go to a house divided against itself, for a representative? Will you allow yourselves to be labelled Liberals, and not know to what political principles you pledge yourselves?

‘How long halt you between two opinions?’ Will you stand like the donkey, between two bundles of hay, and vote for neither party?

“My Friends! Liberalism pretending to be Loyal and Constitutional, is a mere blind. Radicals, Republicans, Communists, Socialists, Nothingarians, all claim justly to be Liberals. They are all found in the Liberal camp. Not Liberals, as having received a Liberal Education! They have not *all* studied those arts which soften manners! But Liberals, in the sense of freely confiscating the property of others, and distributing it among themselves and partisans! As the Irishman said of the thieves—‘They are mighty generous with what does not belong to them.’ Such Liberals persistently caricature, misrepresent, and vilify Conservatism. As though, in this age of progress and enlightenment, we could, if we would, preserve glaring abuses. Conservatism does not narrow the political arena. Conservatism leaves statesmen free to advocate all well-considered practical measures of real reform, provided that no sacrilegious hand is laid on Throne and Altar, the pillars of the Constitution. Radicalism, under the false plea of Reform, encourages political adventurers to revolutionise the State, to pull down everything established; to try all kinds of rash experiments to gain temporary popularity, and the solid rewards of office, place, power, pension, pelf! These ‘advanced’ Liberals ask: What is the use of Conservat-

ism? The reply is obvious. No man without principles, can be honest, either in public, or private life. The Conservative statesman gives pledges that he will not legislate against the Constitution. Independently of this guarantee, the *vis inertiae*, the weight, or staying-power of Conservatism, acts precisely like a drag, in preventing the State Waggon from running too fast down-hill!" (Cheers from *waggoners, carters, &c.*, who understand the illustration.) "I appeal to facts. How often has this Conservative element saved our Constitution, by resisting hasty legislation and rash innovations which would otherwise long since, have destroyed the balance of our political structure, and reduced us to the level of Republican corruption, and to the periodical barricades of Paris!

"In vain do respectable and less advanced Liberals, disclaim such extreme agitators as allies, while accepting their assistance in elections, indignation-meetings, and other party tactics. 'Birds of a feather flock together.' '*Noscitur ex sociis.*' A man is known by his friends. We Conservatives repudiate such allies. We will not march through Laxington with such a ragged regiment. They know we are ashamed of them. Repelled from the Conservative camp, they gravitate naturally towards the Liberals, to whom they truly belong! That is their natural home which shelters them. The great Liberal Statesman who tries his best to

make oil and water mix ; to unite loyalty to the Constitution, with Liberal principles ; and the blazing, blustering Demagogue who spouts treason and sedition, are equally *Liberals* ! The great Liberal Statesman must have popularity at any price. He condescends to stump oratory. He stands on the same platform with avowed Republicans. Yet, forsooth, he is greatly astonished when you call his loyalty in question ! His reputation must, and actually does, suffer, more or less, in the opinion of all loyal subjects, quite irrespectively of party. He makes frantic and galvanic efforts, to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds ; to sit on two stools at once. One day, he will discover he has paid too dear for his whistle. Meantime, the alliance has this most serious effect : it tends to undermine the Constitution. The grand old Liberal Statesman is now all things to all men. He coquets with Republicans. He thinks that demagogues are his tools. One day, he will discover that, in this round game of ‘Beggar my Neighbour,’ he in his turn, will have become the puppet of Republicans !

“I place no confidence in the grand old Statesman, supported by those very advanced Liberals who openly avow their intention of abolishing, as soon as possible, the House of Lords, and the Monarchy. I call a spade a spade. I say such men are *traitors* to our Constitution. I call on all who have learned the alphabet of political honesty, to assist

in driving these wolves in sheep's clothing out of the fold! While he keeps such company, the grand old Statesman will never have sufficient force to withstand the '*prava ardor civium jubentium*'—the popular tyranny in a national crisis. Place loyalty in one scale; love of popularity, power, and office in the other. Loyalty would kick the beam. Here is the rock ahead of Constitutional Liberalism. That ill-found bark, manned by a divided crew, is bound to founder in a storm. Who knows whether the grand old Statesman will stop, or can stop, short of revolution, in time to save our Constitution? He prefers the temporary plaudits of the masses, to the steady support of intelligent citizens, who understand the Constitution. Trust him not in times of political excitement. His eloquence, his great abilities, do not prevent him from being a weathercock which veers to the wind; a political go-cart, an automaton with springs, which can be pushed, or worked at will, in any direction, by his so-called supporters—his real masters! He virtually says: 'My masters! I am completely in your hands. Only signify your supreme will and pleasure. Push me sufficiently hard, and I will go in any direction, to any extent, as far as my most advanced supporters desire. All I require, is one strong, united shove. I began as a Conservative. I had principles once. I have long since surrendered them. My most cherished political

convictions are now at your mercy. With Robespierre, I think the people can do no wrong. I am your humble servant. In theory, a monarchist, and first minister of a Constitutional Queen; a proposal to destroy the Constitution cannot decently originate with me. But you will find me, as you have ever found me, pliable; a political nose of wax. If you, my masters, really wish to overturn our time-honoured Constitution, to try the experiment of a Republic, with myself as first President, I am your man.'

"In conclusion: Conservatism saves us from Anarchy, to which Radicals are fast driving us. Liberals, who think they can save the Constitution, delude themselves and you. Extreme men are the boldest. They always come to the front, in a national crisis. When sent to the guillotine, by his *friend* Robespierre, Danton, too late, discovered this truth. He said: 'In revolutions, the power always remains in the hands of villains!' Vainly do Liberals think they can restrain their Republican allies, and stay the advancing tide of Revolution. Radicals and Republicans would make a clean sweep of all our cherished institutions; turn our political pyramid upside down, and plant it on its apex, instead of its base! Our Freethinkers object not merely to an Established Church, but to all Religion, to Christianity, to any visible national public recognition of God! They are Wretches who would, in Herbert's

awfully blasphemous words, ‘dethrone the King of Heaven, as well as the kings of the earth.’ I, a Conservative, would preserve to you, and bequeath to posterity, that most precious privilege — freedom to worship God !”

Mr. Stedfast concluded, amid loud and long-continued cheering.

Shifter followed. But “The Working Man’s Friend” shall have the place of honour in another chapter.



CHAPTER III.

AN OLD-FASHIONED ELECTION — SCENE AT THE
HUSTINGS—MISS WILDGOOSE ATTEMPTS TO
SOFTEN POLITICAL RANCOUR !

SHIFTER addressed the people, very much in the style of Jack Cade :

“O, my poor down-trodden brothers ! Would that I could truly call you Freemen ! I will not flatter you. Why am I here ? I come at the call of Duty ! I, a man of the People, one of yourselves, a horny-handed son of toil, venture to intrude myself into this charmed circle of Aristocracy ! I come between the wind and their Nobility ! Personally, I am a nervous man. If I depended altogether on myself, I would tremble at my own audacity. But I am strong in the good cause : ‘*Vox Populi, vox Dei.*’ I ought to apologise for quoting Latin. I have never been to College. There were no Board-Schools in my childhood. *I* am not hand-and-glove with nobility and gentry ! *I* have only the People at my back ! That’s the reason I’m not afraid. You have heard Danton quoted. I can quote Danton too. When they had dethroned the King, who was in league with their enemies, and when France trembled at the approach of the invaders, Danton ascended the tribune,

and thundered out :—‘ It is not the Prussian cannon that you hear. It is the *pas de charge* against the enemy. What alone is wanting to success? *De l’audace, et encore de l’audace ; et toujours de l’audace !* ’ Yes, my poor down-trodden brothers ! And I say to you :—What you want is *Courage ; Courage* to resist your oppressors. *Courage* to tell your tyrants to their faces, you will be no longer slaves ! ”

This clever clap-trap told with many ; but not with all. There were cheers and hisses. Some persons cried out, “ Bunkum ! we’re not slaves ! ” The popular orator continued :

“ Some of you say, you are not slaves. Your tyrants delude you. They add insult to injury. They tell you you are free. Thus it is with the masses all over Europe ; everywhere in fact, but in the glorious American Republic ! It is a part of Kingcraft, Priestcraft, and Statecraft, to deceive the People, by telling them they are free already. Look now at facts. What would have happened here, had I not come down to rescue you ? Why, you would have been sold again, as your ancestors were, in old feudal times, before—aye, and after *Magna Charta*—sold with the land, like swine ! *Magna Charta* only freed the Barons from Royal tyranny. The People still remained slaves—greater slaves than before, being oppressed by the King, and by the Barons. The condition of the people was not materially altered down to the days of

Gatton and Old Sarum. Ah, but you'll say ; ' All that slavery went out with the Reform Bill in 1832.' No ; it did not. What passed the Reform Bill ? What passed all popular reforms, before, and since ? Fear of the growing power of the People ! The American Revolution paved the way for the French Revolution. That again, directly, and indirectly, helped on British Freedom. The old tyrants trembled, lest there should be a similar revolution in England. The Oligarchy resisted it. The Duke of Wellington, the Tory incarnation of *Duty*, said, ' There shall be no Reform.' The peers and bishops voted against it. But when they saw the Middle Class in earnest, they gave way. That gigantic humbug of history, the Duke of Wellington, was going to put down the House of Commons, and march twenty thousand men from the Land's End, to Inverness. He got his windows smashed, and jolly well he deserved it." (Cheers !)

" Well, the Middle Class got Reform ; that is, enfranchisement for themselves. But the People remain enslaved. Capitalists use you up, body and bones, to make their bread. That is, they use you up in factory, mine, mill, and workshop, to heap up colossal fortunes for themselves—the Capitalists—the great Middle Class, who won emancipation for their own class, and left the People ignorant, oppressed, serfs, and slaves ! The Middle Classes had fought their fight against

the feudal system, represented by my lords and gentlemen, and their vassal Candidate." (Cheers from Radicals: counter-cheers from Conservatives). "The Middle Classes had come off victorious. They had obtained their share of power, and had joined their former oppressors, to oppose you, the People. Now, but one class is left to accomplish the final social revolution, and to end the class antagonism which has so long impeded human progress." (Great applause from Radicals). "There is only one way for you, the down-trodden People, to raise yourselves, to win Emancipation, as the Middle Classes did in 1832. Shall I tell you what that is?" (Cries of "Yes, yes; tell us, tell us!"). "I will. Mark this. Choose your representatives from your own Class—real working-men, the horny-handed sons of toil; one of whom at present addresses you!"

Here, the orator's voice was drowned in applause. While it lasted, the unblushing "humbug" waved his hands, which had not done a stroke of hard work for thirty years! The Working Man's Friend continued:

"You can depend on men of your own class, not to betray you. They sympathise with you. Their interests are yours. You can keep an eye on, and control *them*. Working-men representatives will well deserve their salaries, for protecting your interests. You are not likely to have many of these working-men in Parliament, at first. But if

you grudge paying them, help to pass a Bill paying all legislators elected by the People; and you will save that expense. Have no more to do with upper-class representatives. Turn the cold shoulder to the titled, wealthy, and respectable humbugs, who now misrepresent, deceive, and betray you. Dismiss those kid-gloved, scented, foppish idlers, who consider the House of Commons a fashionable Club; those wily lawyers who betray your interests, and vote away your hard earnings. If you can't have a House of Commons wholly composed of working-men, leaven it at least. The Scripture says, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.'"

At this somewhat profane application of the Saviour's words, the pious Mr. Gnatstrainer appeared bent double, with keen enjoyment of the jest! In spite of his hypocrisy, the real nature of the man, and others like him, appeared. Professing to consider every word of the Bible inspired, the Gnatstrainers of our day, both in private and public, invariably enjoy profane applications of sacred texts! Shifter continued:—"Don't believe those who tell you, you are now represented. This division of the County might as well be a pocket borough. Where is the representative of the highly-respectable and intelligent working-men, whom I now address—men whom I should feel honoured to call my constituents?" (Great cheering from Radicals.) "And men who will honour themselves, by

setting the example of returning a working-man to Parliament." (Renewed cheering, which lasted for several minutes.) The Radical Orator continued :—"Friends! you have no representative! You know well, you never had one." (Cries of "Colonel Cannon" from Conservatives.) "Oh, yes! you had a *Cannon*, but he has gone off, for the first time." (Laughter.) "He may have been a great gun in the field! But he was never heard in the House. Or, if he ever made a report there, he only fired blank cartridge. He never hit the mark, by remedying any abuse. Did he ever do any good to any one of the People? If any of you have ever been on the Horse Guards' Parade in St. James's Park, you must have noticed a monstrous cannon, *stolen* from India! That piece of ordnance is all for show. It's of no use, and would bust, if fired off. Well, that great, big, useless cannon, placed where it is, without the People's leave asked, or granted, is an exact emblem of your late so-called representative. Colonel Cannon went into Parliament, as the nominee of a noble Earl, not a hundred miles off. That Cannon was put into Parliament, by a sham election, so far as the People's will was expressed. He never was of no use to anyone but himself, and those who put him there. What for? you may ask. Why to serve as a warming-pan! Rather a come-down in the world, you'll say. But the Cannon did serve as a warming-pan.

He kept the seat, till it was wanted for someone else. Well, the noble Earl had got another nominee ready—his noble lordship's nephew and heir. But even noble lords must, to some extent, march with the age. The nephew was unpopular. So, a compromise was prepared. You were to be represented, by a so-called Conservative working-man! I have heard of, but never seen, the nondescript. Now, I know what he is. You Conservatives may hector and bluster, to your heart's content. You shan't prevent Samuel Shifter, the Working-Man's Champion, from saying what he's got to say. The Conservative Candidate is a man who, by hook or by crook, has raised himself above his class, on which he looks down with contempt. He is no longer a working-man, and is, therefore, unfit to represent working-men. He is a trimmer, a time server, a turncoat, who has sold himself to the aristocracy and capitalists. And he will certainly sell you, if you are foolish enough to return him to Parliament."

This gross personal attack on Mr. Stedfast, hugely delighted the Radicals, and proportionately irritated the Conservatives; and (to their credit, be it said) the respectable Liberals, who knew it was false! The two parties hissed and railed at each other, and nearly proceeded from words to blows. This latter diversion was temporarily postponed from curiosity to hear Shifter's peroration. Quiet being restored, that accomplished stump-orator wound up as follows:—

“Men of Laxington, I have come down to save you from the political vampires who have hitherto sucked your blood. When you get manhood suffrage, you will be no longer like toads under the harrow, trampled upon, imposed upon, insulted, despised, and betrayed by noble lords, and honourable gentlemen. What has made our Country great? Four crafts: Handicraft, Agriculture, Manufactures, Commerce. According to the Development theory, John Bull must have an Ass’s head, to allow another dead weight of crafts to ride on his back. You ask what crafts?” (“Yes, what crafts?”) “I will tell you. Kingcraft, Aristocraft, Priestcraft, Statecraft! Here are four useful and necessary crafts, sat upon, and trampled on, by four useless and mischievous crafts! Send me to represent you in that House, now falsely called the Commons’ House, usurped by Aristocratic place-hunters. I pledge myself to speak out boldly for you, my brothers. There’s no milk-and-water about me. You won’t have a dummy, or a kid-glove crutch-and-tooth pick representative, in Sam Shifter. You’ll be on the road to manhood suffrage. And not till you’ve got that, can you be free. Elect me, my friends! Set a patriotic example, which will be followed throughout England. Let Laxington be the first to shake off the oppressing incubus of Aristocraft, and declare that henceforth, the Counties shall no longer be treated as pocket-

boroughs of great land-holders. That a titled nullity shall no longer be able to echo the Duke of Newcastle's famous, or rather infamous, saying about his Newark voters. 'May I not do as I like with my own?' Let Laxington stamp her strong foot, and swear she will be free. Let the tidings go forth, like a fiery cross throughout the country, summoning all patriots to do, or die! Let your brothers in America hear that Shifter, the Working-Man's Member, has redeemed you from being bought and sold like cattle! That Shifter has tolled the knell for the downfall of a proud, hinsolent, and hover-bearing Holigarchy. '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori!*' In Shelley's glorious English :

'Rise like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number!
Shake your chains to earth, like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you;
Ye are many—they are few!'"

It is almost impossible to describe the effect produced by this bombastic rhetoric. It completely dissipated the impression made by the sterling sound sense of Stedfast's speech. The Laxingtonians were as fickle as the Roman populace, when led away by Antony's artful eloquence, after the truths spoken by Brutus. In his peroration, Shifter spoke, and looked defiance, at the Earl of Laxington. The stump-orator was greeted with vociferous cheering. A forest of dirty

hands were held aloft, to pass a resolution, which not one in a hundred distinctly heard, or understood. Outside the Conservative phalanx, no one dared to object, with impunity. The few rash enough to make the attempt, were promptly hustled, bonneted, and suppressed, by practical advocates of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity! They were so fond of Liberty, that they kept it altogether for themselves! And the use they made of their Liberty, was to bellow like raving maniacs. This is no fancy picture. I simply describe in part, what I heard and saw, at an open-air indignation meeting in Lincoln's Inn Fields, held not long after the Hyde Park Riot in 1866. So mischievous was the influence of Shifter's seditious speech, that the Radical mob threatened to become unruly. Inarticulate howlings, like the cries of savage beasts, were followed by railing, menaces, and threats to storm the hustings. Some one suggested that the Rector should endeavour to soothe the rioters, with a few words of Christian exhortation. But the Reverend Mr. Headlong was unwilling to speak. And the mob was determined not to hear him. Nor was this very surprising. It was reported that the Reverend gentleman, in an unguarded moment, had said: "It is a great pity there are no military present, to quiet these ruffians by a little blood-letting." Some one objecting to this, as most improper in a clergyman, the exemplary Priest replied:

“I don’t want much blood. Just enough to serve as a lesson for the future.” These remarks excited the popular indignation to a great height. So that the Rector judged it prudent to retire from view; or, in Cæsar Spry’s phrase, “to take a back seat.” The Conservative Candidate stood like a rock! Nor did the Earl of Laxington blench. The firm demeanour of these, and other gentlemen (among whom Lord Oddfish and Captain Rasper were prominent), inspired the Conservative party with confidence, and had its moral influence on the Radical rioters. For all Britons appreciate “pluck.”

I have already stated that Miss Wildgoose made one of Lady Honoria’s party, at the windows of an adjoining house. But Miss Wildgoose had no intention of assisting as a mere observer and hearer. She burned to take part in the proceedings. To this she was incited by the natural ambition of distinguishing herself, as the leader of the Movement for Women. Moreover, she really wished to aid in returning Mr. Stedfast. But her principal object was to captivate and win the Earl, by a display of those qualities which marked her lofty superiority to other ladies, trying in the usual indirect, common-place, female fashion, to attract his lordship! Miss Wildgoose determined to play a bold stroke for a husband. The Earl would never be able to resist a lady, who had taken a prominent part in a contested election; had

addressed the voters, and helped to return his favourite candidate! Miss Wildgoose's purpose had been further confirmed, by an incident of the previous evening. The subject of women interfering in politics, and at elections, had been discussed with considerable acrimony. And, as usual, Miss Wildgoose found herself in a minority of one. Lady Honoria had read aloud, what Miss Wildgoose characterised as "an infamous caricature," a description of an electioneering woman.* The satire elicited much laughter and "chaff." Miss Wildgoose declared she would speak from the hustings, and thus personally disprove the man's malicious slander! She had, accordingly, quitted her place at the window, and ascended the hustings. Here she remained in the background, during the speeches of both Candidates.

No sooner did the disturbance begin, than Miss Wildgoose saw her opportunity. Her favourite theory was, that women-voters would soften political rancour! Men, who would wrangle, quarrel, and fight with each other, would be subdued at once, by the interference of lovely woman. Perhaps, if a young and lovely woman had said a few soothing words, the crowd might have listened, and acted on them; precisely for

* "On the Claims of Woman to Political Power." By Luke Owen Pike, Esq., M.F., F.A.S.L. *Anthropological Review and Journal*, April, 1869.

the very reason that the lady did not condescend to party-politics! Even Mr. Jacob Bright admits: "There was, no doubt, a considerable amount of mire and dirt connected with politics." But it was quite a different thing, to be lectured by a strong-minded, middled-aged, female party-politician, practically claiming the privileges of both sexes: a man's right to speak, and influence voters; a woman's right of immunity from insult. In vain, did the Earl, Mr. Stedfast, Lord Oddfish, and Captain Rasper, advise her not to persist in her design; urging that the Radicals were in a dangerous humour, and not likely to tolerate such a violation of precedent. "I will create a precedent," said Miss Wildgoose. In vain, they represented that the angry mob might not confine their insults to mere words. In vain, the American gentleman observed that "the riff-raff was raal ugly, and might rile up, and give her particular fits." Miss Wildgoose had determined to speak. They were obliged to let her have her own way, cautioning her to avoid any irritating party-topic; and not to take offence at any rough language. Had she followed this good advice, she might have succeeded in gaining a hearing, and avoiding insult. She began thus:

"Enlightened fellow-citizens! I stand here to demonstrate a grand principle—two grand principles. First, the abstract right of every woman to be a citizen; to claim a vote, to

show that there is nothing unwomanly, in woman taking part in politics. Secondly, to prove that woman can soften political rancour. You hear it said, women should not meddle with politics. Polling-booths are not fit places for women. That we unsex ourselves by stepping down into the mire and dirt of politics.” (A voice—“So you do!”) “I treat that brutal interruption, with the contempt it deserves. The sooner polling-booths are made fit for women, the better for us, and you too!” (‘Bosh!’) “No, sir, it is not ‘Bosh,’ and you are very rude to say so. I grant that, as now conducted, elections are brutal. But why are they brutal? Obviously because they are managed, or rather mis-managed, by men alone! The presence of women would soothe and soften men. Give women the suffrage! Let them play an active part in politics, and then—” (‘Well! what then?’) “Pray, good people, don’t interrupt. It breaks the thread of my ideas.” (‘Stick to your sewing-machine!’) “I know nothing about sewing-machines. I am a *lady*, and do not sew for a living. I say, when women take part in politics, there will be less acrimony. The presence of women would soothe and soften men.” (‘So you said afore, Missis. But it ain’t terew. You’d only exasperate huz, and make us wusser.’) “Yes, if all men were like you! Women’s presence at elections would banish brutality. There would be no swearing, no drunkenness,

no bribery, nor corruption; no foul nor obscene language, no horse-play nor practical joking, no hooting, howling, groaning, interruptions of speakers, no loud speaking"—('Except when the Shrieking Sisters pitched their voices too high.') "In short, none of all these disgraceful scenes, in which *men* have indulged to-day! Women would pour oil on the troubled waters of political strife, just as I am now doing." ('No, you ain't, Missis. You ain't got no hoil. All you says is gammon!') "I hope that person is not entrusted with a vote. He is too ignorant to understand a metaphor. I have proved my postulate. You are all listening attentively to me, at last. As Cæsar said: '*Veni, vidi, vici!*' I have softened your political rancour! Politics are fit for women. Women are fit for politics!

"I now proceed to the question. The last speaker, Mr. Shifting—Shiftless——" ('Mr. Shifter! Don't call names.') "Speak more politely to a lady. Mr. Shifter said:—manhood suffrage was coming, and not till you got *that*, will you be free. I hope you may get it. But manhood suffrage alone, without woman suffrage, will never make you free. You heard Mr. Shifter quote Shelley. I can quote Shelley in favour of Woman Suffrage. Shelley asks: 'Can Man be free, if Woman be a slave?' Certainly not! It shows man's vile selfishness, that he demands the vote only for himself, and not for woman

also." ('Draw it mild, Missis!') "Is it right that tinkers and tailors, hewers of wood, and drawers of water; that all sorts of men, good and bad; voters who can't sign their names, should have votes, and not respectable educated women; ladies like myself? That the Baroness Burdett Coutts should be without the franchise, while a chimney-sweep renting a four-roomed house in Camberwell, should be permitted to vote? Do you think we, the women of England, will remain satisfied much longer, to be ruled by Tom, Dick, Harry, and have no voice in framing the laws we obey? I, as a representative woman, answer, No! Yet not one word fell from your Candidate, in favour of poor women. He posed as the redresser of all wrongs, except those affecting one half, and the better half, of humanity! He spoke of ending class-antagonism, and pulling down aristocracy—but not one word against the last and worst aristocracy—of Sex! It was throughout, a thoroughly selfish appeal; and you, like *men*, cheered him to the echo! He called you the down-trodden people. How about down-trodden women, all over the world? He told you to choose your representatives from your own class—one word for you, two for himself—not a word for women-voters, and women-representatives. He told you not to believe those who told you, your class were represented. Are we women represented?" ('Yes; by husbands,

sons, fathers, brothers.')

 "I say, No. We want direct representation. He said you would honour yourselves, by returning him to Parliament. It was a thorough man-like tirade, a one-sided, selfish appeal for himself, and his class.

"That is my first objection. Why did he not say one word for women-suffrage? Because he thinks women are generally Conservative. Well, why not? I am myself a Conservative. And what most disgusted me in Mr. Shifter's address, was his gross personal attack on the Earl of Laxington, and Mr. Stedfast. Your popular idol was not afraid to speak evil of dignities, and to slander the best of men. Mr. Stedfast paid the highest possible compliment to your intelligence, by telling you the truth. Mr. Shifter did the very reverse. He flattered you, as all demagogues do. While pretending to think you capable of judging politics for yourselves, he in reality deceived you, and talked down to you like children. He utilizes you as tools to build up his own fortune. He never lost sight of Number One, from beginning to end. If you were the clever people you fancy yourselves, you would see through him. He knows you thoroughly. You don't know him, or you would not trust him. You would not applaud him, when he grossly abuses Mr. Stedfast, the People's real friend. Mr. Shifter is the real enemy of the People——"

Here the storm broke out afresh. The

patience of the Radical mob was at last exhausted. They were not disposed to tolerate censure of their Candidate. A stentorian voice cried: "Woman, go home to your babies!" The strong-minded woman lost her temper, at this cruel witticism, and the shout of derision it provoked. At her own Mutual Admiration Meetings, Miss Wildgoose had been somewhat spoiled. She had grown accustomed to respect, deference, flattery; above all, not to be interrupted by the men permitted to co-operate in the Movement for Women. The "strong-minded" lady was used to snub men; but totally unaccustomed to be snubbed by men! If she could have borne this last insult, she might, perhaps, have been allowed to conclude. But she became womanish and hysterical. Forgetting her theory of sexual equality, she fell back on man, her equal, for protection!

"I don't come here to be insulted." ("Why do you come here at all? Go home to your babies!") "I tell you I will not be insulted with impunity. A wretch in the crowd tells me to go home to my babies. I have no babies. I am an unmarried lady. I insist on that miscreant apologising; or being taken into custody. Do you call yourselves *men*, and allow a monster like that, to insult a lady? My lord, Mr. Stedfast, will you not order the police to secure that man; or at least to get his name and address, so that I may summons him for his disgraceful insult? If there's law

in England, I'll have redress." ('Shut up! Go home to your babies!') "You are a pack of base, unmanly wretches, to repeat that gross insult to a maiden lady. From such a swinish multitude, I expect nothing but bribery, corruption, and rottenness——"

"Did you say you expect rottenness, marm?"

"Yes, rottenness."

"Don't disappoint the lady. Let her have it, Bill!"

Here came a shower of rotten eggs. Several struck Miss Wildgoose, and one hit her exactly on the open mouth. She was removed in a fit of hysterics, and carefully conveyed by Lord Oddfish, and Captain Rasper, to the house occupied by Lady Honoria and friends. Here, Miss Wildgoose was promptly and kindly attended to. She recovered, a sadder, and, perhaps, a wiser woman. Perhaps not! It is due to Lady Honoria, and party, to state that no further words of undue levity escaped them. They showed real sympathy with Miss Wildgoose, and did their best to soothe and comfort her.

Meantime, the Radical mob, thoroughly irritated by the Wildgoose episode, kept up a playful shower of missiles, in the shape of rotten eggs, vegetables, a dead cat; and seemed inclined to resort to still more practical marks of displeasure. At the most critical moment, when the disturbance looked serious, and the rural police seemed but a

forlorn hope against the unruly mass, a diversion was made by the burly form of Harry Bluff, landlord of the Crown Inn. He came to the front of the hustings, and, taking off his hat, essayed to address the meeting.

For a time the noise was redoubled; the Conservatives insisting he should be—the Radicals that he should not be, heard. At length, the ex-bruiser made his voice heard like a speaking-trumpet:

“Now then, Shifter, Working Man’s Friend and lover of fair play, are you agoin’ to keep them lambs of yourn quiet? The more you try to drownd my voice, the worse it will be for you, I promise you. I means to speak if I stands here all day.”

Something like silence was restored. Boniface continued:

“Friends on both sides, I didn’t intend to interfere to day. We publicans are somethink like parsons. We don’t have no call to meddle in politics, ’cause I’ve good customers in both parties. But I ain’t agoin’ to stand by, and hear you deceived by a lot of —— *lies*. That’s plain English. I’ve knowed both Candidates from byhood. A h-honester or better man than Muster Stedfast, is not to be found in hall Hengland. Wot then? Muster Shifter had a good right to come down here, and try to git the seat. I don’t blame him for that. I blame him for not fightin’ fair. I blame him for wot he did afore the election, and for tryin’ to blacken the character of his bene-

factor. Muster Stedfast was his oldest and best friend, and lent him money which he never repaid. But that ain't nothink to wot he did, only eight days since. Wot do you think of Shifter goin' to Muster Stedfast's 'ouse, and deceivin' of his old friend, with a story about him (Shifter) comin' down to Laxington to git money to pay him, and bein' disappointed; and had no tin to carry him back to Lunnon? Wot do you think our noble, generous Conservative Candidate did? He believed Shifter—more's the pity! Muster Stedfast didn't know the Working Man's Friend as well as I do, or he would have kicked him out. But Muster Stedfast, bein' a gentleman, didn't think an old pal would come and tell a mean lie. So Muster Stedfast not only forgave him the old debt, but gave him thirty pounds in cash, for himself and his family. A nice story I could tell you about how Shifter has behaved to his wife and family; but I sticks to the pint. Well, don't Muster Stedfast's generosity beat the Good Samaritan out and out? Ain't thirty gold sovereigns a considerable sight more money than twopence?

“Stop a bit, Friends! I ain't quite done yet. This happened on the twelfth. Next morning, when Muster Stedfast came into Laxington, and saw Shifter's precious Address, he knowed how he had been done. It wasn't the money. To a gentleman, like Mr. Stedfast, thirty pounds ain't no more than thirty pence

to me. But, to be deceived, swindled, cheated, robbed by one whom he trusted——”(Here the worthy “Bung” was interrupted by cries of “Shame,” and a storm of hisses at Shifter) “You may well cry, Shame! But Shifter don’t know wot shame means. Most men would have kep out of the way of the gentleman they had deceived and robbed. Not Shifter! Wot do you think he had the cheek to do? Why, he came up and offered his hand to Muster Stedfast. And because Muster Stedfast refused to touch that dishonest hand, Shifter spoke agin him, accusin’ him of bein’ too proud to own his old fellow-apprentice, and wouldn’t forgive him for opposing him! Whereas, if Shifter had come forward, fair and open, like a man, and not played a dirty election-trick, Muster Stedfast would never have refused his hand. Well, in course, the people couldn’t help believing Shifter’s artful lies, and got wild agin Muster Stedfast; and Shifter’s rowdies called him a bloated aristocrat, and hunted Muster Stedfast down the High Street, to the ‘Crown Inn.’ And now this Shifter, with Muster Stedfast’s money in his pocket, not satisfied with abusin’ his benefactor in the printed Address, misrepresents and insults him to his face, and calls him all the vile names he can lay his tongue to. There’s not a word of truth in all he says agin Mr. Stedfast. *He* made his money honestly. *He* was always a Conservative. *He* never changed his politics. What do you

think of that, Friends? Don't that beat all? Put politics out of the question. I intend to vote for a h'honest man! Whether you are Conservatives, or Radicals, at least choose a h'honest man. I denounce Shifter as a man without gratitude, truth, and h'honesty. He sold and betrayed his best friend. He'll sell and betray you, if you trust him. Why, I'd as lieve vote for a common thief, as for Shifter! There's many a h'honester man in gaol! He's been and obtained money under false pretences—a breach of confidence, far worse than stealin'. And I hopes Mr. Stedfast will take the law agin him, and quod him!"

Bluff's speech was the last, and, if not the best, the most effective. It was the plain, unvarnished truth, and signally illustrated the axiom: "*Magna est veritas, et prævalebit.*" As the honest fellow proceeded, opposition generally diminished. Shifter, at first, furious with indignation, tried to interrupt. But Bluff shook his brawny fist in Shifter's face. "You've had your say. I'll have mine. If you interrupt me, you and me will have a little account to settle."

Shifter became pale with apprehension. When Bluff had finished, the "Working Man's Friend" made another abortive attempt to address the crowd. He was silenced with a hearty burst of honest execration, which did credit to the people's sense of justice, truth, and honour! Amid cries of "Swindler, Liar, Thief, Traitor, &c.," the rotten eggs, and other

savoury election missiles, were now directed against Shifter! Nor was this all. The crowd were so exasperated that they readily responded to the American gentleman's suggestion: "Lynch the mean cuss! Lynch the durned skunk." Shifter was only saved from being roughly handled, by the personal intercession, and active interference of the man whom he had insulted, traduced, deceived, swindled, and betrayed! Yes, the true Christian, the noble-hearted Stedfast, stepped forward, interceded with words, and shielded with his body, his false friend! This timely intervention saved Shifter, and completed his humiliation! For the first time, the Working Man's Friend was completely cowed, and was fain to beat a hasty retreat!

CHAPTER IV.

PATRICIAN AND PLEBEIAN—THE EARL AND THE DEMAGOGUE.

IN vain did Gnatstrainer, and other partisans endeavour to rehabilitate Shifter, by declaring him maligned and misrepresented, and sneering at Bluff's speech, as merely an election-dodge! The people knew better. The facts could not be denied, or explained away. Shifter's party rapidly diminished. Many respectable Liberals and Radicals refused to have anything more to do with him. They could not distinguish between his private, and public character. They would not believe that a man, far worse than a thief, could be a trustworthy representative! They argued that a man who deliberately betrayed his benefactor, would betray his constituents, and sell them and himself for place, pension, power, and pelf! It is possible, also, that Gnatstrainer and other partisans, who had come in for a share of the rotten eggs thrown at Shifter, were not quite so eager as they had been in his cause! The result of the poll, when declared in three or four days, showed upwards of 3,000 voters for Stedfast, and under five hundred for Shifter! For such an ignominious defeat, Shifter had to thank him-

self. But for his disgraceful conduct towards Mr. Stedfast, Shifter would, doubtless, have made a much better fight. If he had not won, at least he would not have been beaten by such a crushing majority. The result of the Election endorsed the worthy Bluff's saying: "Cheating never prospers!"

It might have been supposed that after such a broad hint, the Working-Man's Friend would have "mizzled" back to London, to hide his head with congenial *spirits* in the Modern Babylon. But, for some reason or other, Shifter still remained at Laxington. The truth was, that Shifter never blamed himself for failure. He regarded himself as a perfect man, in moral, spiritual, and secular affairs. The disciple of the Hall of Science did not admit himself a sinner. Of course, he was like a king, and could do no wrong in politics! There was the awkward fact that he had failed. Like Napoleon, Shifter had been defeated for the first time. Admirers of Napoleon tried to make Grouchy the scapegoat for Waterloo. Shifter was determined to find his scapegoat in Blackadder, to whom, he had paid fifty pounds "all for nothing." Ever since the Election, Shifter had been in a semi-drunken state. He had forced Blackadder to accord him one interview, and had endeavoured to bully his accomplice, into a return of the fifty pounds. But here, Shifter met his match. Blackadder laughed at the proposal, as a good joke. When Shifter

continued to urge his demand, Blackadder said :

“ You paid me that fifty pounds for telling you the seat for which Stedfast was a Candidate. I fulfilled all the conditions of our bargain. I betrayed the secrets of my party. I notified you when to come down. You found your Address (which I wrote) printed and published, that is placarded about Laxington. I’ve fulfilled my share of the bargain. If you had been returned, you would have owed me fifty pounds more. It’s bad enough for me to lose that, by your bungling the matter. But now we’re quits. To talk of my refunding the fifty pounds paid me for value received, is absurd.”

“ You refuse to return the money ? ”

“ Of course I refuse.”

“ Won’t you give back half ? Won’t you give back something ? ”

“ Not a penny ! ”

Shifter now began to bluster. Blackadder was a little man, but very determined. He coolly drew from his pocket, a pen-knife, opened one of the blades, and held the weapon in his hand :

“ Why, I thought you carried nothing less than a Bowie ! Don’t think to frighten me with a paltry pen-knife.”

“ Little as it is, the blade is long enough to find its way to your heart. So I advise you to keep your hands to yourself.”

Shifter forced a laugh, and said he was

only joking. But he grew pale, and made some pretence to shift his seat, so as to have the table between him and Blackadder. Shifter then said :

“ Well, it’s precious hard lines for me. I have all my trouble and expense for nothing. And I’m made a fool of into the bargain.”

“ Put the saddle on the right horse, Shifter, Confine yourself to truth. The ball was at your foot. You might have won, if you would have fought fair. Honesty is the best policy, sometimes. And then, I should have been entitled to another fifty, which you have done me out of, by your confounded folly. I have a far better right to complain, than you have.”

The confederates drank together, and chatted, apparently on friendly terms. But each bore malice to the other. By no means an uncommon state of mind, between conspirators ! Each had a grievance. Blackadder was disappointed in not getting the other fifty pounds. Shifter, nettled at failure, had charged Blackadder with double-dealing, and not working for him. Moreover, Blackadder’s language rankled in his mind. For Shifter, forgetful of the previous warning, put his hand on his companion’s shoulder. Blackadder at once shook off Shifter’s hand, exclaiming almost fiercely :

“ Hands off, Bully ! I don’t understand practical joking. Keep that for your boon companions at ‘ The Magpie and Stump.’ ”

"Why, you're a regular Aristocrat," said Shifter tauntingly. "I don't believe you care a blasted bit for the People."

"Keep your cant for the stump! Much *you* care for the People. Your love for the People begins and ends at Number One."

Shifter burst out laughing at this, and from force of habit, or because he was pot-valiant, again laid his hand on Blackadder's shoulder.

The Secretary again shook off the touch of the Demagogue, as though he were some unclean animal. "Once more, Shifter, hands off. Remember this, if we should ever meet again. Say what you like. Hard words break no bones. But no horse-play. That leads to blows, and I take a blow from no man."

"You're mighty particular in some things," sneered Shifter.

"You're not particular in anything."

"Perhaps you would challenge a fellow to fight, if he insulted you."

"No; I would not."

"What would you do?"

"Why, if he were a fair match, I might condescend to fisticuffs. But if a big bully attempted to take advantage of superior weight and strength, to knock me about, that paltry pen-knife would find its way to his heart, if I swung for it!" *

* These words were once actually addressed to the Author! It seems superfluous to adduce the fact. Not only individuals, but whole nations practise revenge, on

The sneer died away on Shifter's pallid lips. Decidedly, Blackadder was not a pleasant companion to drink with! The accomplices parted, each secretly hating, and distrusting the other. Shifter bore a grudge against Blackadder, and determined to have satisfaction for his fifty pounds, in some shape. The Working Man's Friend also resolved to kill two birds with one stone; to show his contempt for Aristocracy, as personified by the Earl of Laxington, and to brave out his (Shifter's) disappointment. The Earl was very particular about trespassers. Common law gave the public a right of way through his park. The Earl did not attempt to exclude people. But notices warned passengers off the grass, and stated that all dogs found at large, would be shot. Such regulations were reasonable. No respectable persons murmured at restrictions, which maintained in proper order, a splendid park practically open to the public. But the British Republican, being at heart a tyrant, respects no rights, but his own. A party of those free and enlightened "citizens" had come down by railway, to enjoy themselves

principle. The Corsican *Vendetta* is proverbial. Spaniards, Italians, and Americans in wild districts, use knives, as Englishmen do their fists. The same devilish spirit of Revenge, makes the refined duellist, thirsting for blood, kill his adversary *selon les règles*, before witnesses. No Christian Moralist can approve of duelling. Yet even duelling is an improvement on brutal murder, in which the victim has no chance!

after their own fashion, by insulting and annoying all with whom they came in contact. They encamped on the green sward of the park, like gipsies on a common. They drank their beer out of pewter-pots, strewed the grass with greasy newspapers, and threw about broken bottles, by which a valuable hunter was lamed! This pleasant picnic party wound up the catalogue of their enormities, by setting their dogs to chase, and worry the deer! Savages indeed! They have all the vices, without the redeeming qualities of savages! Our dangerous classes are far worse than savages! It was mainly owing to the exploits of these ruffians, that the Earl was compelled to issue such strict regulations about his park.

Shifter resolved :

“To beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall.”

The Atheist could not make a vow to God, and being totally without chivalry, Shifter was the very opposite of Earl Percy. Nor did Shifter's drunken arrogance carry him so far as to hunt the deer with, or without, hound and horn. But he determined to take his pleasure, after his own brutal black-bottle fashion, in the Earl of Laxington's woods. Shifter strolled about most defiantly “from morn till dewy eve,” and capped the climax, by encamping on the lawn, in full view of Laxington House windows. There, he

established his temporary bivouac; eating, drinking, and occasionally addressing a small crowd of boys and lads, who stood on the path, at a little distance. Such insolence could not be tolerated. The Earl perceived the outrage, and was almost petrified with astonishment and indignation. He first ordered the delinquent to be brought before him, but immediately countermanded the order. Perhaps he thought so daring an offender, would utter political sentiments calculated to demoralise the domestics. So his lordship decided to go alone, and reconnoitre. It was now dusk, and as the Earl went forth in a velveteen shooting-coat, and slouched hat, it was just possible that Shifter did not recognise him. The Earl began the dialogue.

“What are you doing there, my man?”

Shifter elevated the black bottle, and with his mouth full, replied :

“Can’t you see, my man, that I am eating and drinking? Will you have a drain?”

If the Earl had obeyed his first impulse, he would have rushed upon his insulter, grappled with him, and captured him, single-handed. But his lordship reflected that such insolence was doubtless too gross to be intentional. The man was drunk, and did not recognise him. Under this impression, which salved his wounded dignity, the Earl determined to parley further. He was not without curiosity to prosecute such an

entirely novel conference. This was the first time that he, the Earl of Laxington, had entered into a personal dialogue with a *roturier*.

"Are you aware that you are trespassing?"

"What do you call trespassing? Eh?"

"Why, my man, if you do it in ignorance—you may be held excusable."

"Oh! yes, I'm very ignorant. I am one of the swinish multitude."

The Earl thought the man uttered an undeniable truth, here.

"Why, you see, this is the Earl's manor."

"The Earl's manner might be more agreeable."

"You don't quite apprehend me."

"Oh, don't I?"

"I mean this is the Earl's property."

"Bought and paid for—eh?"

"No sir—inherited from his ancestors."

"And how did they come by it? Honestly—eh?"

"You are very impertinent."

"You think the Earl has a right to all this land—eh?"

"I don't *think*; I *know* he has."

"Where's his title?"

"Do you presume to question the legality of the Earl's title?"

"I only ask where, and what it is?"

"Why sir, the title-deeds of the Estate are lodged with the Earl's solicitors, and can be

produced, if necessary, to satisfy any competent questioner."

"Oh! if you come to liars (lawyers) I'm regularly flummuxed. And pray, how far down below the surface, does the noble proprietor's right to the land extend?"

"Why sir, that is almost, if not altogether, a legal question. It cannot be answered off-hand. Doubtless, the Earl's right extends to treasure-trove, that is to say, to money of all kinds, ancient and modern, found hidden in the earth; also to all mines of whatever sort, whether of coal, iron, tin, copper; or the precious metals, gold, silver, etc."

"I suppose now liars (lawyers) could make out the Earl's right, down to any extent; a mile or more."

"If by liars, you mean lawyers, no doubt they could. Though mines rarely penetrate to such a depth."

"Never fear, liars (lawyers) will lie to any extent! They'd make out the Earl's title down to the centre of the earth, perhaps."

"If it were possible to get there, doubtless the right of the owner of the soil, would be legally held to extend so far."

"Why not further? Why not right down through the centre, to the other side of the earth; to the Antipodes. There's a long word, to show I'm not drunk."

"Pshaw, sir; you're jesting."

"Not a bit. I'm in sober earnest. Only, if the owner carried his right so far, he might

interfere with the rights of other owners of the earth's surface. Ah, well! our Christian missionaries, who go to the savages with Bibles, brandy, and cannon balls, soon settle the rights of savage owners of the soil! Rest content with the centre of the earth, where priests place Hell! That's where I'd like to see all the landlord's rights, and title-deeds, along with landlords themselves, and the liars, the Devil's Own."

"You speak like a leveller, a revolutionist, a republican, a socialist."

"Shall I tell you how much land, the Earl of Laxington is really entitled to, as a man?"

"If you please."

"Six feet by two is what all men are entitled to. The Earl will have to be content with that, some day?"

"But, meantime, some one must own the land."

"Let the land be held by the people, for the people's benefit. You may tell the Earl of Laxington, with my compliments—(the compliments of Shifter, the People's Tribune), that the time is coming, and not so far off, when he, his descendants, and all his class—(lazy, idle, good for nothing, but slaughtering game, and hunting—*Fruges consumere nati*—don't forget the Latin), will cease to be the nominal owners of the soil—as they have ceased to be its raal owners—when this fair and spacious park will be employed to grow food for starving millions, the people, the toilers, the

breadwinners. I should like to see this park cut up into cottage-lots, and cabbage gardens. Give every agricultural labourer, his three acres and a cow."

(It is only reasonable to suppose, that this latter luminous idea had then begun to germinate in the minds of political economists, though only recently matured!)

"What, sir!" cried the Earl, "are you such a barbarian, that you would really like to desecrate this noble park, by cutting it up for cottages, and cabbage gardens?"

"Why not, sir!" cried Shifter, fiercely, "if the People wish it. How much longer do you think will the horny-handed sons and daughters of toil, permit the Drones to fatten at their expense? Of what use is the Earl of Laxington? What does he do?"

"The Earl gives employment to hundreds. Society cannot be all on a dead level. As Pope, a truly Conservative and Classical poet, writes :

'Order is Heaven's first law: this stands confest
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest.'

"Oh! I can match your Conservative, with a People's poet. What think you of Burns?—

'Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;
A man's a man for a' that.'

What does the Earl do for a living? Did he ever do a stroke of hard work in his life?"

"The Earl is a very active man. He takes a great deal of out-door exercise."

"Does he? I hope his exercise gives him

a good appetite for his dinner of a dozen courses, and his wine. There is no restraint on a nobleman's belly."

"The Earl is M.F.H.——"

"And what's that, when it's fried?"

"I don't understand your slang."

"What's the meaning of M.F.H.?"

"Master of Fox Hounds. The Earl hunts this portion of the County. He is respected, beloved, and popular."

"I never heard so much good of him before. But he and his class are doomed. Take Shifter's word for that."

"I hope, Mr. Shifter, that should this terrible revolution come in our time, that you will be merciful, as you are great. We shall probably have as much Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, as they had in France, during the Revolution. I hope you will exert your authority, as Tribune of the People, to save the Earl from popular fury, or from the guillotine, which will doubtless be in full play."

"No, I won't! The Earl must take his chance, along with better men. If the Earl were standing here before me, and condemned by the sacred voice of the People, '*Vox populi, vox Dei*,' I would not crook my finger, to save his worthless life."

"The Earl will be much obliged to you, Mr. Shifter, when he hears your humane intentions."

"The Earl must share the fate of his class. All such idle drones and mischievous oppres-

sors must be swep away. The People must be masters. The House of Lords is a h'hospital of incurables. It is doomed. The Throne will foller. A National Convention will appint a committee of public safety——”

“To cut off the heads of the People, and of each other, as in the French Revolution.”

“Perhaps so. But we'll settle the Aristocrats fust.”

“Don't make too sure of that.”

“The Committee of Public Safety would invest Tribunes with summary powers, to arrest all persons suspected of incivism, that is, of being reactionaries to the popular government”

“Precisely so. All lovers of Liberty, and a constitutional government, such as we now enjoy. And what then, pray?”

“Every prisoner brought before the tribunal, must show his hands.”

“What for? To show that they are clean? Then, I fear, it would go hard with some of your Radical supporters at the hustings, the other day, whom you called your brothers. I noticed some of them were very dirty brothers!”

“No, sir,” replied Shifter, fiercely. “The Revolutionary tribunal will compel all its citizens to show their hands, not to see if they are *clean*—but to see if they are *soft*! All those, whose hands are not hardened with h'honest toil, will be, *ipso facto*, condemned, as luxurious triflers, living on the People! There's Law and Latin, both, for you.”

“And popular injustice! This summary method of distinguishing between workers, and non-workers, would condemn not merely idlers, but all clerks, artists, and skilled workers in delicate trades, as well as all who labour with the *brain*, the hardest of all workers.”

“You can’t speak from experience, there!”

“Nay, I think you would hardly escape yourself, Mr. Shifter,” said the Earl, with a glance at Shifter’s hands, which made the People’s Tribune wince, and for the first time, remain silent, as if not ready with an answer. The Earl followed up his advantage.

“You would make short work of both Houses of Parliament, and the Government?”

“That we would,” said Shifter viciously.

“Doubtless, you would put your levelling principles cleverly in practice?”

“Never you fear that.”

“But when you had succeeded in this revolution and bloodshed; when you had cut off the heads of the tallest flowers—I speak figuratively—when you had destroyed rulers, and decimated the people——”

“Decimated the people! Do you think the people—the rulers would be such fools as to decimate themselves?”

“I know they actually did so in the French Revolution. That there were ten or a dozen of the People, for every noble man or woman, guillotined! And don’t imagine the People would escape in a British revolution. They

never do in such cases. The rich can get out of the country. The poor cannot. But suppose you succeed, as Robespierre did, in cutting off all the best men, the moderate men, the men capable of carrying on the government ; don't you think you might find some difficulty in restoring confidence, in building up again the Social system so ruthlessly destroyed ? ”

“ Not a bit ; the people can govern themselves.”

“ Still you would require some one to inspire confidence ; some acknowledged leader ; some saviour of Society.”

“ Bust your saviour of Society ! That's the trick by which Napoleon became Emperor. France could have done better without him.”

“ France did not think so, or she would not have elected him to supreme power. A frightful civil war raged between these republican exemplars of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The streets of Paris were rendered impassable by barricades ; on one of which, the Archbishop was shot ! After a street fight of three days, in which more generals were killed than at Waterloo, this terrible revolt of June, 1848, was suppressed by General Cavaignac, a Republican ! All this happened before Napoleon came to the front at all. The republican general had told them plainly : ‘ Whoever pulls up the pavement, shall never live to replace it.’ Nevertheless, the revolt would have broken out again, but

for the *coup d'etat*. That was trifling, compared to the terrible slaughter of Republicans, by Republicans! Don't you think so many masters would breed confusion?"

The People's Tribune drew himself up proudly, and said pompously: "*I* should be there."

"Perhaps you might not be there! But if you were, what power could you have? After you had taught the people to rebel against lawful and constituted authority, and to destroy their natural leaders, do you really think they would implicitly obey *you*, one of themselves? You have read the French Revolution to very little purpose, if you think so."

"Beware how you slander the People's representative."

"The People's representative here, is Mr. Stedfast. Who appointed you? Yourself?"

"The People can govern themselves. Look at our Trades' Unions."

"The most tyrannical system in the world."

"No doubt you, the privileged classes, think so."

"I refer to the tyranny over the people themselves. The enforced payment of all workmen, exactly the same wages, quite irrespectively of good or bad workmanship, is so monstrous, that none but slaves would tolerate it! And this is the result. Every honest, industrious, skilled, sober Unionist Workman carries some knavish, idle, worthless,

drunken workman on his back. That is, the good have to support the bad workmen, as well as themselves and families. But that is not all. They are taxed by their Unions, to support, in addition, the demagogues hired to teach them to be discontented, and to murmur against everything, but the Trades' Unions, which make, and keep them slaves."

"Demagogues have as good, if not a better right, to live on the people, than the aristocracy, the peers, and the parsons."

"Especially that most estimable demagogue Broadhead, who hired a man of the people to shoot his brothers! Fine Fraternity."

"He didn't mean to murder—only to cripple him, so as he couldn't work; and it was quite right."

"Of course, *you* naturally defend intimidation, amounting to mutilation, as you do murder, in revolutionary times. You are quite consistent with your principles—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!"

"Say what you like, the people are virtuous."

"Especially the people led by demagogues. Mutilation and murder prove that! But suppose the revolution effected. You would be worse off than before."

"How do you prove that?"

"Very easily. All trade is at an end. Factories closed. Men are out of employment. Banks, shops shut up. Capitalists leave the country, or hoard their wealth. All mutual

confidence is destroyed. Provision-dealers afraid to open their shops. The people are starving. Those who have lost relatives, meditate revenge. Blood shed in civil war, cannot be wiped up like spilt milk, and forgotten. Every revolution leaves to the country, a legacy of hatred, and determination to be revenged by the beaten faction. You may write, publish, declaim the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—all hollow falsehoods! The things do not exist. You have the brotherhood of Cain and Abel. Mob-law, Reign of Terror; to be succeeded by a necessary, but odious, military tyranny! After deposing, or destroying the superior classes, the people turn their weapons against each other. Besides, bread must be got. You have leavened the honest working classes, with the occupants of the gaols. You have abolished capital punishment for murder, and imprisonment for debt. The swindler no longer fears a prison; nor the murderer, the gallows. Such are your revolutionary ingredients for making a prosperous, contented, happy and united nation! You have sowed the wind, to reap the whirlwind. You have anarchy, and the only remedy is a Dictator—one big Tyrant, to compel the mass of political tinkers to cease from further mischief, and to return to their daily labour. Strange belief that it takes years to learn a mechanical trade; but that the Science of Politics requires no apprenticeship; that any

and every man is fit to govern his fellow men! This is the routine of all revolutions. And so it will be with the British revolution you are preparing, if the good sense of the people, especially of the middlec lasses, does not avert it in time. You see, Mr. Shifter, that I thoroughly know you, and your class."

"And I know *you* to be the Earl of Laxington."

The Earl started at finding himself recognised.

"Never fear," said Shifter, still good-humouredly drunk, and not yet arrived at the blood-thirsty stage. "The devil's not so black as he's painted. Some say he's a perfect gentleman, quite the Aristocrat. Ha! ha! And there are worse people than demagogues."

"That I can hardly believe."

"Look here. You are a Patrician, I a Plebeian—natural enemies——"

"Why so?"

"Why so! Have you not got everything we want to have? If you won't give it all up peaceably, in course, we must take it by force. *Væ victis!* You have wealth, rank, property, public respect, leisure; your pick and choice of all good things. The Aristocrats, the liars (lawyers), the parsons, and the squarsons have been leagued against the People long enough—far too long! You, the licensed thieves, have had your innings. Now, we want our turn. And we intend to

have it. You make us pay tithes to parsons—what for?”

“To make you Christians.”

“Bosh! Many parsons are not Christians, but tithe-hunters, preferment-hunters, fox-hunters.

‘Religion is a political law,
Meant to keep poor fools in awe.’

Our Church is a gigantic job, to afford relief to younger sons of nobility and gentry, and aid the State to deceive the people. Parsons preach up patience and poverty, to the poor. If we only sweat and grunt under our weary loads, now, there’s a good time coming, when we are dead! What do you think of that rubbish?”

“I think it a most blessed, and beautiful, true, and comforting belief.”

“And parsons believe it themselves?”

“Of course they do.”

“And live up to it, eh?”

“Generally. Here and there, a hypocrite may be found.”

“Well, I’m frank. I’m an Atheist. I believe in no God. I think Death an eternal sleep.”

“Horrible!”

“May be so. It’s better than hypocrisy. But why don’t we believe in what the parsons preach?”

“Because your hearts are hardened by sin.”

“No; because parsons don’t practise what they preach. They are the biggest humbugs out. Look at the Reverend Mr. Headlong!

Why, if you pricked his bottle-nose, it would bleed port-wine. Don't he love purple and fine linen, greetings in the market-place, and uppermost rooms at feasts? As for his 'dear brethren' among the pore, Headlong won't touch them with one of his fingers. Parsons are all Conservatives and Aristocrats at heart; mammon-lovers, and preferment-hunters. I hate 'em worse than I do the Throne and House of Peers, and that's saying a good deal. I want a revolution, to get the bishops out of the House of Lords. Depend upon it, the bishops will drag you down along with them. Throne and Altar will fall together. And great will be the fall thereof."

"You are the most dangerous person I ever heard."

"You're not accustomed to hear the truth spoke so plain. I'm a regular out-and-outer. Perhaps if you would let me get into Parliament, I should be more polite. Who knows? Perhaps I might learn good manners; how to conceal my thoughts in fair words; how to deceive and betray my constituents; how to fawn, and scrape, and lie, and sell my vote for office, and turn my coat, like the rest. If I'm a dangerous person, you've got yourself to thank for keeping me out of Parliament; and I'm a regular firebrand. I'll tell you a secret, my lord. Why, I protest, I'm learning good manners already. I've called you, what all Christians are forbidden to call any man! Well, my lord, your only

chance to preserve your class-privileges, is to get the very wust demagogues into Parliament, or else shut their mouths with good sinecures and pensions. Look at Beales, the man of our barricades; the man morally and legally responsible for pulling down Hyde Park railings! Before the Reform Bill, he would have stood in the pillory, if he had not been executed for high treason. See what Gladstone's government did for the successful Traitor, Agitator, and Demagogue, who roused the People to riot, revolution, and rebellion; and thereby turned out the Conservatives, and put the Liberals into power. The grateful Gladstone made Beales a County Court Judge, with £1,400 a year! And now, Beales is as mute as a fish. Beales has given up patriotism, and gone in for Constitutional submission to the powers that be!"

"There's truth in what you say. That appointment, by a Liberal government, was disgraceful—an incitement to treason!"

"So say I, my lord. I'll make a bargain with you. Get me an appointment, or a pension of one thousand, or even five hundred pounds a year, and I'll quit the stump, like Beales."

"Suppose, I informed the world of your double-dealing?"

"You would not betray confidence, my lord. *Noblesse oblige!*"

"I was not aware our conversation was confidential."

“Besides, if you should peach, I’d say it wasn’t true! No one would believe you. My mates would take Shifter’s word, before that of a bloated Aristocrat.”

“I fear they would. Your followers are ignorant, deluded, and deceived.”

“Right you are, my lord. And now, I’ll prove to you two things: First, that there are worse people than Shifter the Demagogue: Second, that you are yourself deluded and deceived.

“Indeed!”

“I have said, we are natural and open enemies. You, a Peer, stand by your Order; I don’t blame you for that. I, a Plebeian, stand by mine. I am a Demagogue, trying to git a living, by pulling down every one above myself.”

“A most true definition!”

“Very well. You know exactly how to guard yourself against an open enemy, like Samuel Shifter.”

“True!”

“You have proved it, by defeating me at the hustings, and seating your *nominee*. But suppose you have a secret enemy—a traitor, who eats your bread, pretends to be your partisan, and flatters you; but secretly despises, hates, and deceives you. He is far more dangerous.”

“If I have such a concealed foe—but this is mere assertion.”

“But if I can prove my assertion, beyond all doubt?”

“You would render me a very great service, for which I should be extremely grateful.”

“You would have good reason to be. But what practical form would your gratitude take? How would you show it? Would it take the shape of a pecuniary testimonial? In plain words, if I unmask your secret foe, what would your lordship give?”

“Mr. Shifter, your statement is so singular : I am completely in the dark.”

“To show you I mean business, I will say the name of the traitor is Blackadder.”

The Earl started.

“I have been warned against him before. But I pay no attention to inuendoes, nor to assertions, unless supported by proofs.”

“You shall have them. Blackadder put me up to come down here, and put you to all the additional expense of a contested election. Blackadder came to London, on purpose to see me, and induce me to stand.”

“Excuse me interrupting you, Mr Shifter, but when did this interview take place?”

“Early in February.”

“The very time my Secretary asked leave of absence from me, to visit his relations in the North!”

“Ah, well, you believe me now. Shall I go on?”

“By all means.”

“Blackadder fairly cornered me, by telling me the name of your Candidate. I never should have thought of coming, but for Black-

adder. For I never could have seen or heard anything of Stedfast's candidature, until after the 13th of this month; when, of course, it would have been too late for me to think of contesting the seat! Now, you know my Address was placarded in Laxington on the morning of the 13th, as soon as Stedfast's."

"I remember that well."

"That proves I had private information. It was all Blackadder's doing."

"Sir, it is easy to say this. But, after all, it is but asseveration unsupported. Why should you seek to injure Mr. Blackadder, by betraying this plot, if, as you say, he has acted for you?"

"He was paid for his information. I have my reasons for hating him. But, never mind. You are right to be cautious. But suppose I can prove he not only put me up to contesting the seat, but acted as my secret agent throughout; got my Address printed, betrayed your plans, and informed me of the nomination-day; so that when I appeared on the 13th, I found my Address already circulated and published. Who do you think wrote my Election Address?"

"It was signed with your name."

"Yes; but I am not the author."

"You cannot mean that Blackadder, my Secretary, wrote that address?"

"I do. Blackadder composed every line, every word of it."

"Impossible!"

“I don’t wonder you doubt—but I can prove it.”

“Prove Blackadder the author of that infamous libel on me, and I’ll——”

“Will you give me fifty pounds down—and—well—I’ll trust to your lordship’s generosity for any further testimonial, you may think fit to bestow.”

“By Jove, I will give fifty pounds, if you prove beyond a doubt, Blackadder the author of that Address.”

“Say ‘Done,’ my lord, and strike hands upon the bargain.”

Before the Earl could reflect, he found his hand grasped in the by no means horny palm of the People’s Tribune, and had been induced to repeat “Done!”

“Now, my lord, I trust you as man to man. Look here, do you know his writing?”

And Shifter produced from his pocket-book, the first rough draft of the Election Address, which Blackadder had thoughtlessly left in Shifter’s hands. The reader will remember that, on hearing the rough draft read, Shifter had given Blackadder a sovereign, and promised another, if the Secretary succeeded in surpassing his first effort. Shifter, therefore, had two pleas for urging Blackadder, to take a copy, and leave him the original. By showing it to the Central Committee, he (Shifter) would stimulate them to furnish the supplies for his Candidature, and by retaining it himself, he would know exactly how far it was sur-

passed by the finished Address. Blackadder was thus persuaded to leave in the possession of his accomplice, an incontestable piece of evidence to his own (Blackadder's) perfidy! Blackadder afterwards reflected that he had acted foolishly. At a recent interview, he had requested Shifter to restore the original draft; he having admitted it was far surpassed by the completed Address, and paid the additional sovereign; there could now be no object in retaining the first MS. Shifter coolly replied that he had burnt it. Blackadder did not believe him, but thought it prudent to let the matter drop, and not irritate Shifter, by appearing to doubt his word.

"It is Blackadder's handwriting to a certainty," said the Earl, after he had carefully perused the manuscript.

Shifter then explained how he had got, and retained possession of this important document; so that the Earl could not doubt that it was Blackadder's composition, as well as handwriting.

"Tax him with it, my lord; he cannot deny it then. And now I have fulfilled my share of the bargain."

"You have, and I will fulfil mine, Mr. Shifter."

The Earl wrote an order on a London bank for fifty pounds, which Mr. Shifter carefully inspected, and placed in his pocket-book.

"And now, my lord, since your lordship has behaved like a perfect gentleman, I don't

mind apologising for trespassing, and also for what offensive words I uttered the other day, during my address at the hustings. My object was really not to wound your feelings, but to stir the people up. As to what is said in my *Address*, Blackadder wrote *that*, not me."

"But you forget that you signed that Address, and so made yourself responsible for every word of it."

"Right again, my lord; but you know at Election times, people do say and publish hard things. It's give and take; hard hittings upon both sides."

"Still, Mr. Shifter, you will find it safer, in future, to confine yourself to truth. An action for libel, is a serious matter."

"I know that from experience, my lord. However, the People subscribe handsome."

"But sometimes a libeller is compelled to pay in person, by going to prison. However, let bygones be bygones. You have apologised. I forgive."

"That's handsome, my lord. And now, to show my gratitude. Over and above the fifty pounds down, and any other additional testimonial forthcoming; I'm raal pleased I warned you against that traitor Blackadder. Don't spare him, my lord. Trust him no further. If you do, you'll repent it. Blackadder's a right down bad'un. I don't believe he'd stick at murder! I never met his match. I don't care for meeting him again. I shall quit Laxington early to-morrow. Here is my

card, my lord, with my address, in case you wish to communicate with me, respecting the testimonial."

He handed his card to the Earl, adding:—"You don't yet know all Blackadder's villainy. I've a suspicion this is not the first time he has betrayed you. When you know him as well as I do, you'll not think *me* the most dangerous person you ever heard. You'll admit there's *one* far worse than Shifter, the People's Tribune. My lord, I take my leave. You see I don't leave my black bottle, to disgrace your lordship's nobby park, and to damage the feet of your deer, horses, and other cattle. Adieu, my lord. Hoping to meet you again, or at least to hear from you, respecting the additional testimonial—the warning against Blackadder is worth another fifty—permit me to say, *Au Revoir*."

And so terminated this very singular, and, in its results, most important, interview between the Patrician, and the Plebeian.

CHAPTER V.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND—THE EARL AND SECRETARY.

THE Earl of Laxington returned to his ancestral halls, a sadder and a wiser man. So, it was true. There were much worse people than Shifter, the open Demagogue, who railed, and threw mud at his opponents. The Earl had nursed an adder in his house, the man well named Blackadder! And this unscrupulous villain, this double-faced traitor, knew the Earl's secrets; was his trusted confidant! Yet, he must be dismissed at all hazards. But would it not be better to do it quietly, not to let Blackadder suspect the real cause? Certainly, if possible. Nevertheless this course required a cooler head, and more tact, than the Earl then possessed. Had he kept his secret a week or two, or even several days, and then calmly intimated to Blackadder, that his services were no longer required; the Earl might possibly have disarmed the Secretary's suspicions. But such reticence was beyond the Earl's moral power. That night, he saw Blackadder, and though the Earl said nothing, his silence was significant; and his looks were so portentous, that the Secretary suspected the coming storm.

Knowing Shifter's escapade, Blackadder had no difficulty in guessing correctly, the real state of affairs. Next morning at eleven o'clock, the interview took place, in the Earl's private room. The library was not sufficiently private. This alone augured the important nature of the subject to be discussed. The Earl began in his most magisterial manner.

"Mr. Blackadder, I have sent for you to say that our connection must terminate."

"With the usual notice, I presume, my lord?"

"No sir; from this day; from this hour; from this minute; you cease to be my Secretary."

"This is a very sudden decision, communicated in a very summary manner, my lord."

"No doubt you find it so. I only wish I had taken it before."

"My lord, do you object to state the cause of this extraordinary treatment? It is not usual to turn off so abruptly, and without a character, a menial servant;—far less a private Secretary."

"You cannot guess why I dismiss you without a character?"

"Not I! *Davus sum—non Ædipus.*"

The Earl, irritated at Blackadder's coolness, assurance, and sneering tones, lost his temper.

"Because you are an ungrateful traitor. Not satisfied with betraying me, you insult

and blacken your benefactor. Because you add the most disgusting and barefaced hypocrisy, to your base treachery. Because you composed that disgraceful, shameful, libellous Election Address, in which you hold me—the Earl of Laxington—up to public contempt, as a titled nullity !”

Instead of being utterly overwhelmed, as the Earl expected, Blackadder calmly and defiantly replied : “ My lord, if your strong language has sufficiently relieved your mind, will you tell me what proof you have of your assertion ? ”

“ Don’t think to talk me round, as you did before, sir. Do you venture to deny that you composed that Address ; that you were in league with the man, Shifter, his accomplice, the originator of the scheme—that you are a false traitor, and a spy ? ”

“ I neither deny nor affirm. I only ask for proof.”

“ Look there, sir,” exclaimed the Earl, producing and holding before Blackadder’s eyes, the rough draft of Shifter’s Election Address. “ No wonder you trembled, when you read the printed Address. Well, sir, here is the proof that you wrote it ! Do you deny your own handwriting ? ”

“ No.”

“ You admit yourself the sole author of that malignant attack on the political party you pretended to serve, and on me in particular ? ”

“I do. I am the sole author. Shifter is nothing with the pen. He could not have written a grammatical address, far less one which you, my lord, called ‘diabolically clever!’”

“You glory in your shame! Have you nothing to say in justification, extenuation, or apology?”

“No.”

“Well, then, here are your arrears of salary. I might prosecute you for a libel. But I leave you to your conscience—if you have one? Leave Laxington House, as soon as you can pack up, and never let me see you, or hear of you again!”

Blackadder took up, and placed in his pocket-book, the bank-note which the Earl had thrown on the table. The Secretary then walked to the door. But instead of opening it, and going out, Blackadder coolly locked the door, and returned with the key to the table. Such a suspicious operation astonished and alarmed the Earl.

“Mr. Blackadder, what do you mean?—do you intend to intimidate—to——”

“Dismiss all apprehensions of personal violence, my lord. I am neither mad, nor a fool. I cannot permit myself the luxury of revenge; at least, of that wild kind. Did you fear I intended murder?”

The Earl shuddered.

“Nay, my lord, if I am so black a traitor, why should I stick at murder? You said

that the author of that Election-Address was certainly an Atheist, and would stick at nothing! But I am a Methodist——”

“A Methodist!” exclaimed the Earl, who had never suspected his Secretary of professing any religion.

“I don’t mean a religious Methodist, but a man of method. I am like the Emperor Napoleon, and other great men. I am not naturally cruel. I never commit a crime, unless it is my interest to do so——”

“It never can be to your eternal interest to commit a crime.”

“Please don’t interrupt, my lord, and don’t cant! You have no reason to do so, for, I repeat, you are not in any personal danger;—that is, provided you do not attempt to stop me prematurely. Now, my lord, let us quite understand each other. Let me request you to withdraw to that side of the table, furthest from the bell-rope.”

“Why so, sir?”

“Lest you should attempt to summon your servants. I don’t want a scene. I don’t want to use violence. But I am armed, and I intend to speak to you alone, without interruption. You see the reasonableness of my request, my lord. You had better comply.”

Remembering Shifter’s warning, the Earl thought it best not to irritate Blackadder; and removed, so as to place the table between himself, and the bell-rope. The terrible Secretary continued:

“Thanks, my lord. Now we’re comfortable. I can speak at my ease. I wish you to feel at ease. To resume the subject, I observed, when you interrupted me with a bit of Sunday-school cant, that I never commit a crime, unless it is my interest to do so. Suppose, now, just for argument’s sake, that I resented your insulting language just now—‘ungrateful traitor’ is irritating—or that you were so unguarded as to use more vituperation, and that I were so foolish as to lose my temper, and shoot you with my concealed pistol—I should not, probably, effect my escape, and, even if I did, what good could your murder do me? Don’t mistake me, my lord. I’m not taking the religious view of accountability in a fabulous future state. That would not be a deterrent. I don’t mean that I should sleep less soundly, for having your blood upon my conscience. But that I should make a mistake similar to that of Napoleon; in the judicial murder of the Duc d’Enghein. It would be worse than a crime—a blunder. Voltaire remarks that a man hanged, is good for nothing. It is the same with a man shot to death. Dead—you could do me no service. Living—it is just possible, you may find it worth while to purchase my silence, on some secrets known to ourselves!”

The Earl could hardly suppress a groan, at this allusion to secrets. But he felt relieved to be assured there was no immediate personal

danger. He said: "You could have effected your purpose, without making me a prisoner in my own room."

"Pardon me, my lord; there, I differ from you. You were so very violent, that you would not have listened to me. At the first hint of my intention to speak my mind at length, you would have summoned your servants, and had me expelled with menial insolence and violence. You began by constituting yourself judge, prosecutor, and jury, all in one, against me, the prisoner. I have now turned the tables. And you are my prisoner, until I have stated the case. '*Audi alteram partem.*' Turn and turn about, are fair play. You have told me a piece of your mind. Now you shall hear a bit of mine!"

"Proceed then, sir, since I must listen, and let us get it over."

"I shall not detain you very long, if you don't interrupt. I strongly recommend you, my lord, not to lose your temper again. Two can play at that game. You have called me ungrateful traitor and hypocrite! I do not deny that I have deceived you."

"No; that's impossible"

"But why should I be grateful, or consider you a benefactor? For taking me as your Secretary, at half the salary another would have demanded? For giving me board and lodging, and treating me like a servant, looking down upon, and snubbing me, as though I were a Pariah, and you were a

Brahmin? In short, my lord, you hired me to do your dirty work, at a cheap rate! You pride yourself on being a Chesterfield. Yet you have studied his precepts to little purpose, or you would have remembered that it is dangerous to offend any one! The humblest person has it in his, or her power, to retaliate. And injuries may be—insults never are, forgiven! You bested me, my lord; took advantage of my poverty to obtain my services at half-price. You pay your French cook three hundred per annum. You would not attempt to beat down Monsieur Chevron. He would not submit. He would transfer his services elsewhere. Perhaps his services are more valuable than mine. He serves your lordship's *stomach*. I serve your lordship's *brain*! But to get an efficient Secretary at half the market-price, does not seem a noble act! Rather what we might expect from a *parvenu*, one of the rich tradesmen whom your class affects to despise, while copying their meanness, and intermarrying with them! But then our old nobility are proverbial for their meanness in money matters!

‘Let science, learning, arts, and commerce die;
But save us still our old nobility.’ ”

“That couplet, sir, was written by Lord John Manners, when a young man.”

“Doubtless when very young, and very green.”

“His lordship has long since expressed his regret, and disowned the sentiment. Under

such circumstances, it is unfair and ungenerous to quote it against him."

"It would be so, my lord, but for the fact that the great majority of your class show, by their conduct, that they fully endorse, and have never got beyond, the *liberal* sentiment of Lord John's youthful muse! They are the most selfish of mankind."

"I dispute your assertion sir."

"Thackeray, who knows your class thoroughly, holds you up to contempt in his 'Book of Snobs,' and his fashionable novels. You cannot dispute that he is a competent judge. By birth, education and association, Thackeray was more intimately connected with the nobility than Dickens. Yet Thackeray evidently despised your Order. Nor are Dickens's pictures of our 'old nobility' very favourable. But to return to our personal relations. You had such a contempt for me, that it did not occur that you might possibly have made a bad bargain, and overreached yourself. That it was dangerous to put yourself so completely in the power of a man you had wronged, and daily insulted——"

"I deny that I wronged you, sir. Considering that I engaged you without testimonials to character; that I know nothing of your antecedents; the salary was fair and liberal. You were not obliged to accept it.'

"Well my lord, even if I granted that, you cannot deny my second charge. You took me because I suited you. You would have

blushed to commit your honour so irretrievably to a *gentleman*! Yet it would have been far safer for you to do so. Why did you trust me? Shall I tell you? Because you thought me too insignificant to injure you. You thought that I—Aaron Blackadder, a nobody, a British Pariah—would feel so dazzled by the honour of doing the dirty work for you, a conventional noble, a high-class British Brahmin, that I would never dream of turning against you; or that if I did, I should be powerless to harm you. You thought that, spaniel-like, I would fawn, and lick the hand that struck me. Some beings in human form, are base enough to do so. Not Aaron Blackadder! Your penetration was at fault. You forgot the adage, that even a worm will turn, when trodden upon. My lord, you should either have treated me much worse, so as altogether to break my spirit; or much better. You have despised me long enough. I defy you to despise me now! You might have made me a friend. You have made me a dangerous enemy!

“So much for our personal relations. Now for our independent characters. Socially, that is in the opinion of slaves and flunkies, who look up to *you* and your Class as social superiors, I have acted very ill. As I am poor, I shall be condemned unheard, by my social superiors, the virtuous and high-bred County magnates who will sit upon, and judge

me. Of course they will acquit you. Nobility, fashionable women, and Parsons, like Kings, can do no wrong. And yet, my lord, are you so much better than I? Of course, *now*, you will answer, 'Yes.' But wait till I have rendered you this parting service, the greatest service one man can render to another. Wait till I have imparted to you, the knowledge which you so sorely need—the most important of all—self-knowledge! Be patient, my lord, and keep your temper. We will pursue the Socratic method. First, my lord, are you so much *richer* than I am? Sneer if you like, my lord. I hope it will do you good. Come now, are you so much richer than I am? Ah, my lord, no man is a hero to his *valet de chambre*, or to his confidential Secretary. I know your true financial position, as well as I know your mental, moral, and social worth. And I know—no one knows better than I, how greatly in every respect you are over-rated by the world! You may know it for the first time, if you will listen to the truth. Ponder this description from Thackeray's 'Book of Snobs.' Does it only apply to an imaginary 'Marquis of Carabas'? Does it not picture your financial situation? 'Next season, when I read of 'Lady Carabas's' splendid entertainments, in the *Morning Post*, and see the poor insolvent cantering through the Park, I shall have a much tenderer interest in these great people, than I have had heretofore. Poor old shabby Snob! Ride on, and fancy the world

is still on its knees before the house of—*Laxington!* Give yourself airs, poor old bankrupt Magnifico, who are under money obligations to your flunkies; and must stoop, so as to swindle poor tradesmen!’ My lord, that was a forced laugh! ‘*Quid rides? mutato nomine, de te Fabula narratur.*’”

“Sir, it is untrue. I am not a bankrupt.”

“No, my lord, you are not a bankrupt in fact. It would be more honourable to you, if you were. Morally, you are a bankrupt. You live far beyond your income. You are throwing your debts on another man’s shoulders. You are burdening another man’s inheritance, so far as you can!”

The Earl ground his teeth with suppressed rage, but kept silence. His tormentor continued:

“If you did this boldly, I might have some sympathy with you. But you are doing it meanly, that is exactly in the style of your Class, and consistently with your own character. You try to compound with conscience, for cheating your heir, by selling him your own flesh and blood——”

“Villain! this is too much!”

Blackadder half drew a pistol from his pocket, and said:

“Be careful, my lord; if you once put me out of temper, your life may be the forfeit. You are here completely at my mercy. Once put my blood up, and you shall be the first victim, whatever may happen to me afterwards.

Ah ! I see you have decided to be reasonable. Keep quiet, and it will be the sooner over. Imagine me a dentist. I put you to some pain. But it is all for your good. And you will feel all the better, when the operation is over. Besides, the more you provoke me, the plainer will I speak. You shall have no excuse whatever for misunderstanding me. You are too intensely selfish to be honest. You are a nobleman. How would an honourable, an *honest* man, have acted in your circumstances ? He would have lived economically, well within his income, given up his hounds, his horses, his house in town, his expensive continental tour, a whole retinue of servants, and stud. He would have ceased to entertain company, to live like a prince, and to keep open house, to be spunged upon by parasites, who verify the adage—‘ Fools make feasts, and wise men eat them.’ He would have lived a quiet, useful, unostentatious life, with the applause of his own conscience, and the respect of some few real friends.

“ All this, you might have done, my lord. But no ; to gratify your own selfish pride and ostentation, you have lived, and continue to live, far beyond your income. You can’t give your daughter a penny. She would be left altogether destitute at your decease, but for the paltry two hundred a year which she inherits from her mother ; and which pittance now serves Lady Honoria for gloves, ribands, and other trifling expenses. You know this

is true, my lord, but being a good Christian, you have provided for your daughter, *more suo*; I should say, with the delicacy which characterises Royal and Noble persons, who sell their female relatives in marriage, with all the adjuncts of Priestcraft—

‘ But honoured well, are charms to sell,
When priests the selling do ! ’

“ You have *arranged*—that is the fashionable cant—a marriage to take place between your only child, and her cousin, the Honourable Mr. Forrester, heir-at-law to the Estate and title, in which you have a life interest. What a nice arrangement this would be, but for three reasons. Firstly, the parties are first cousins. And such marriages, though legal, and not banned by the Church, are radically bad, and almost always lead to an afflicted progeny, when not sterile. Secondly, the parties are in no ways suitable in tastes, pursuits, and habits of thought. Such a pair can no more unite, than oil and water can mix. Thirdly, the parties do not even pretend to love one another. They cannot even be betrayed into that delusion, under which so many idiots labour, only to have their eyes effectually opened after marriage. In his rare visits, Mr. Forrester must perceive that his cousin does not care for him. You well know he is not the man to inspire love in any modest woman. He is an open, unclean liver, who has not even the grace to pay that homage which vice pays to virtue.

Mr. Forrester is not even a hypocrite in his amours, but is openly qualifying to emulate the fame of Colonel Charteris, vulgarly called Chartres.

“My lord, even you cannot go through the farce of asking your daughter to love this honourable libertine. But you will ask her to marry him. You permit him to take the usual cousinly liberties; to press his sensual mouth against her pure lips. In vain do you, and virtuous Society, cover up this transaction with phrases, to hide its gross and hideous immorality! The plain fact is, you are willing to barter your daughter’s prospects of future happiness, in marriage with a bad man, whom she does not love; and so bribe your son-in-law to advance you money to keep up your establishment, and to wink at your burdening the Estate, which will be eventually his, if he outlive you. I call this selling your daughter in marriage. So it will be called by the world, outside of your immaculate set, who, in their eager pursuit of stars, garters, titles, and other conventional honours, have forgotten what truth, honesty, and real honour mean. My lord, I am no saint, but, bad as I am, I am incapable of sinking to the Aristocratic meanness of selling my own flesh and blood, to gild my tarnished escutcheon, and pursue, a few years longer, the race of ruin. If I should ever have a daughter, I would train her to look upon such a man as your proposed honour-

able son-in-law as upon a dangerous animal. What, my lord, can you not still continue to look down upon me with virtuous indignation? What is my conduct towards such a sorry, shoddy, sham benefactor as you are, compared with your own conduct towards your only child? Why I, even *I*—the *traitor*, blush for you. I, the disgraced and ruined Secretary, can blush for you, my noble patron. I feel for you, at this moment, a kind of pity mingled with contempt, and virtuous indignation. Shall I go on, my lord? Or have I said enough to make you for once in your life, see yourself as you are?"

Apparently, Blackadder had said enough. In the excitement of his impassioned words, he had only noticed that the Earl was unusually quiet, and remained fixed in one position. The cause was now apparent. The Earl had fallen forward with his head on the table in a swoon, the result of contending emotions. Blackadder was at first greatly alarmed. Had his murderous words produced a fatal result? Was the Earl dead, or dying? If so, Blackadder might be held legally, as he certainly was morally, responsible. It is sometimes possible to kill as effectually with the tongue, as with poison, pistol, dagger, or any deadly weapon! Blackadder's first impulse was to fly. But he reflected that flight would criminate him. He therefore

approached the Earl, raised his head, loosened his neckcloth, and ascertained that he still breathed, and that his indisposition would be probably only temporary. Greatly relieved, Blackadder unlocked the door, rang the bell, and told the footman to fetch a glass of water for the Earl, who had fainted; to summon his lordship's valet, but on no account to alarm the household, or Lady Honoria! The valet arrived with restoratives. Blackadder waited, and assisted, till the Earl revived. But before his lordship had quite recovered consciousness, the ex-Secretary judged it prudent to quit the apartment. His preparations for departure were soon made. Indeed, he seemed always ready to change his quarters at a very short notice. In two hours, Blackadder left Laxington House, without any further interview with the Earl.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ELOPEMENT:—THE CURATE MADE SCAPEGOAT!

THE Curate's name has not before been mentioned in this Book. The five previous chapters have been devoted to the Election contest. The Curate's wooing has apparently stood still. Since the last meet of the season, and its eventful results, two weeks had elapsed. During the interval, nothing worthy of record in the Curate's history had transpired. Nothing had occurred to interrupt the Curate's waking dream of bliss. The lovers had contracted a secret engagement. An additional zest was given to their happiness, in the consciousness of this fact. They were all in all to each other. The busy, curious world had not yet been invited to watch, speculate, pry, and intrude into their Eden. For three weeks, then, the Curate had occupied what may be called the table-land of his happiness. He was very happy in the present. And yet he looked forward to a higher happiness. He still said "*Excelsior*." Or, in better Latin "*Excelsius*!" As Pope writes :

" Hope springs eternal in the human breast.
Man never is, but always to be blest."

The Curate still looked forward to perfect Earthly happiness, in his union with Lady

Honoria. He had no misgivings, no fears. She loved him. She had admitted it, in that memorable moonlight ride home. And the confession derived an added solemnity, from the terrible subsequent peril to both ! Why then should he doubt Lady Honoria's constancy ? The Election contest was barely over, before Laxington was thrown into still greater excitement, by an event of purely local interest. But for the better comprehension of readers, preliminary incidents shall be related in regular sequence

For some time back, the Rector's financial affairs had been growing more and more involved. His debts had accumulated, till they amounted to several thousands of pounds. Hitherto, he had succeeded in gaining time, by informing his principal creditors, that his only son was engaged to Miss Askew, a wealthy heiress. The Rector pledged his word, that, as soon as possible after the marriage, he would honourably liquidate his liabilities. He found it necessary sturdily to deny certain rumours, to the effect that Mr. Headlong, junior, had no intention of fulfilling his father's wishes. The creditors were disposed to wait a reasonable period, till time should determine the event. They thought it probable that young Headlong's scruples might be removed. Rumour spoke the truth. Young Headlong had no intention of selling himself in marriage, to pay his father's debts ; nor of studying for the Church, to obtain the

reversion of his father's living. The only possible chance of changing the young man's decision, would have been by persuasion, entreaty, and gentle reasoning. To these, the Rector was the very last man to have recourse. He was totally unfitted for any such mild process, by nature and position. As for *grace*, the less said the better! Like the Roman Centurion, the Rector had been accustomed to say to one go, and he goeth; to another come, and he cometh; and to another, do this, and he doeth it. Only the Rector issued his orders in a more arbitrary style, and with more infirmity of temper than the Roman Centurion. *He* had been trained to obey, before he was suffered to command! The Rector had undergone no such salutary training. Private patronage had pitchforked him into the living, while a very young man. He was set to control others, while totally unable to control himself! For upwards of thirty years, he had been accustomed to order, rule, dictate, hector, and to be obeyed. He was in the most literal sense, a *Rector*! But of that "rule over his own spirit," by which alone the Christian Minister can really influence his fellow-men, the Rector knew nothing! He never practised the "*Suaviter in modo*," except to his social equals and superiors. To all others, he was *fortiter in re*. He frequently styled himself in his sermons, the head of the parish, and never gave way when he could possibly avoid doing so. He did

indeed stand in awe of his wife, who had a quick temper, and a fluent tongue. She begged him to leave the delicate task of influencing their son, entirely to her. Had the Rector done so, she might have succeeded. But he would not. His natural love of bullying got the upper hand. On two important subjects, where he had no right to do more than suggest, advise, and request ; the foolish father flatly ordered the son to obey. The result was what might have been expected — Rebellion !

Young Headlong was his father's son, and flatly refused. In vain did Headlong, senior rave, rant, stamp, and storm. In the intervals of his rage, he condescended to what he called argument ! He represented that, if Henry did not enter the Church (by which he meant take Holy Orders) he could not get the family living, the only provision for him, at his father's death. That, if Henry did not marry Miss Askew, and obtain possession of her fifty thousand pounds, his father would not be able to pay his debts. The young man remained obdurate. The argument ended in altercation, and that, as usual, in a scene, in which the father reproached the son for his filial ingratitude. The son, certainly, had the best of the argument. He insisted that he could not conscientiously enter the clerical profession, for which he had no vocation. He would not blasphemously declare that he was "inwardly called by the Holy Ghost" to take

Holy Orders, while his real object was to obtain the family living! This objection would have greatly raised a son in the estimation of a worthy father. The objection only increased the irritation of the Rector. He thought that his son intended a covert sneer at his father's worldly motives in entering the Priesthood. The Christian Pastor sneered at his son, for presuming to have a conscience. "Oh! yes, to be sure, you have a very tender conscience! You'll let your father become a bankrupt, or go to prison, rather than marry this heiress, and pay my debts!"

The son replied that there was no occasion for his father to become a bankrupt, or to go to prison. That his father might reduce his expenses, give up the greater part, or the whole, of his annual income to his creditors—

The Rector furiously interrupted: "And how are we to live meanwhile, sir?"

"Why, sir, there's my mother's income."

"What! vegetate on three hundred a year! And, I suppose, you recommend me to be my own curate?"

"Why, certainly, that would enable you to give up £150 *per annum* more to the creditors, and you would be all the sooner out of debt."

"Rather say I should soon pay the debt of nature. Do you wish me to shorten my days by hard work? to fly in the face of Providence by committing suicide? Pah! Be my own curate, indeed! A nice curate I should

make!" exclaimed the Rector, in a tone of unfeigned disgust.

Henry probably agreed with his father's negatively expressed opinion that he would not make a nice curate! The young man only observed: "Of course, to get of debt, you must make some sacrifices."

"You're determined to make none yourself! Not that I really ask for sacrifices. All I ask is, for you to qualify for the reversion of a living worth nine hundred a year, and to marry a young lady with fifty thousand pounds! Pretty sacrifices, indeed! Ninety-nine out of a hundred young men would jump at your chances, sir. But you, forsooth, plead your tender conscience, just like one of those canting, Dissenting hypocrites. You'll teach your father—eh?"

The truth is often very unpleasant. Young Headlong was in the right. Old Headlong was furious. His son thought it best not to answer him. For the Rector had been a bruiser in his youth, and, in one of his fits of ungovernable fury, thought nothing of hitting out straight at his son!"

"I suspect, sir, there is a secret personal motive at bottom of your disobedience. Something in that low flirtation you carry on with that vulgar, impudent, plebeian girl—Gnatstrainer's daughter. You make yourself the town-talk by your folly."

The young man's patience gave way at this insult to his beautiful "Blinkbonny!"

“Miss Gnatstrainer is not so vulgar as Miss Askew; far handsomer, and much better tempered.”

“You had better marry such an angelic creature!” sneered the Rector. “Out of my sight, sir! And, if you don’t make up your mind to enter the Church, and marry the heiress, I’ll disown and disinherit you!”

The latter was a very terrible threat from a man plunged in debt, and whose income ceased at his death!

The Rector had a personal spite against Miss Gnatstrainer, independently of her being the child of a Dissenter, who ignored his authority, and preached and prayed against him. The cause was this. The Rector had long left off paying for anything which he could get on credit; which, with him, was equivalent to getting it for nothing! Consequently, his credit with shopkeepers was greatly impaired. He was, to use a vulgar phrase, “better known than trusted.” Yet some shopkeepers, who would have declined to send to the Rectory, things ordered by a servant, did not dare to refuse credit to the Rector in person. The Rector frequently took advantage of this awe for the Parson! And, when he wanted an article on credit, would not send, but go for it himself. One day, he went into the shop at the Post Office, and began selecting an umbrella. He chose a good, strong, serviceable article, and was proceeding to execute his usual manœuvre,

of leaving the shop without paying. He merely nodded superciliously to the young person behind the counter; said "Book it!" and then tried to "hook it!" But Miss Gnatstrainer was quite equal to the occasion. On the plea of ascertaining the price, she took the umbrella out of the unsuspecting Rector's hand, and declined to give it up again. She politely, but firmly, informed her "queer customer" that the terms were Cash!

The Rector was indignant that a young person should presume to speak so to him.

"Don't be impertinent. Give me the umbrella, and book it to my account."

"I am not impertinent. I am doing my duty. I have no orders to book it. You cannot have the umbrella, without paying for it."

With a look intended to annihilate opposition to his will, and with severe dignity, the Rector said:

"Young woman! you strangely forget yourself to speak so to me."

"I must do my duty."

"You greatly exceed your instructions."

"Pardon me, sir, I know my instructions much better than you do. I take my business instructions from my employer alone. Our terms, as you see for yourself, are Cash on delivery."

"Of course to strangers! I am the Rector of the parish; your ruler and spiritual guide."

"I know all that, sir. But we make no exceptions."

"I am certain Mr. Sorter would be angry with you, if he knew you had refused me credit for such a trifle. When he comes in, tell him that I took the umbrella on credit. There, give it to me without more words."

Miss Gnatstrainer's blood was up.

"Sir, I will tell him nothing of the kind. I have not been rude to you. You have been rude to me. My proper name is Miss Gnatstrainer. You have no more right to call me 'young woman' than I have to call you 'old man.' To prove to you, I am not exceeding my instructions, I forbid you to take the umbrella without paying for it. The price is ten-and-six. I am responsible for it. If you don't pay the money, I must."

The Rector in a royal rage, uttered some very unclerical language, and left the shop. No sooner had he gone, than Mr. Sorter came in.

Miss Gnatstrainer told him what she had done. He replied "You have done quite right. Sell it to the Rector on credit; No, indeed! Far better make a present of it at once. Then, at least, I might get some show of gratitude. But if you had let him take it on credit, I should never have seen the colour of his money, and would be expected to be grateful to the Rector for his custom."*

* This incident is an actual fact! All that I have changed to suit the exigencies of my novel, is the *sex* of the person who refused the clergyman the umbrella on trust!

Owing to the difference between the Rector and his son, the Curate was placed in the very unpleasant position, of being selected for a confidant by both parties. Rector and Rectoress expected that he should actively assist them in promoting their views. The Curate asked "How?" They replied:—By talking to the wilful young man, like a clergyman; by enlarging on their son's wickedness, in violating the fifth commandment. Again, the Curate asked "How?" "How! Good gracious! Was not the self-willed young man flatly disobeying his parents, by refusing to study for the Church, to get the family living? Also for refusing to marry an heiress, selected for him on purpose to pay his father's debts?" The Curate saw it was useless to attempt reasoning with them. They were like two children. They never saw but one side of any question, directly associated with their interests, wishes, and feelings! Not only did they think their son wicked and ungrateful, for not doing exactly as he was told at whatever sacrifice to himself. They more than hinted that the Curate was lukewarm in his duty, in not zealously embracing, and actively forwarding their views!

The Curate promised to speak to Mr. Headlong, junior. The opportunity soon came. That very day, the young gentleman called on the Curate, and implored his intercession with Mr. and Mrs. Headlong.

Young Headlong spoke without reserve. His conscience would not permit him to enter the Ministry of the Established Church ; nor to marry an heiress whom he did not love.

“ Now, Mr. Weatherall, don’t you think me right to refuse my obedience to my parents, who wish me to act in both matters, dead against the dictates of my conscience ? ”

The Curate would never have sided with the parents against the son. But previously to his own education by the world and development of his feelings by Love, he might have temporised. Now, he replied emphatically, “ Right. Of course you are right.”

“ Then you don’t blame me for standing out on both points, against the Governor and my Mother ? ”

“ Blame you ! of course not. I honour you for acting according to conscience. I wish there were more like you. I shall tell Mr. and Mrs. Headlong, that I entirely approve of your decision.”

The young Oxonian warmly pressed the Curate’s hand, but seemed quite at a loss for words to thank him. At length he said : “ Mr. Weatherall, your approval is very gratifying. I know Curates who, in your place, would have talked lots of twaddle, merely to ingratiate themselves with their Rectors. But, Mr. Weatherall, whatever people who don’t know you, may say, I know you to be a—regular—genuine Bathbrick ! ‘ And no mistake,’ as Augustus Julius Cæsar

Spry, Esq., says. If I ever hear any one abuse you, I shall be tempted to carry out the Yankee's threat to a snob in the hunting-field, and give him 'a lick in the mouth.' Barring the Governor, of course ! Neither of us minds what *he* says."

The Curate thanked the young gentleman for his zeal, but forbade him to get into any quarrel on his (the Curate's) account. Mr. Weatherall carried out his promise, and duly got into hot water thereby. Rector and Rectoress quarrelled with the Curate, because he would not advise their son to act against his conscience. They flung aside the cloak of Christian courtesy, whenever they found it inconvenient. It would have been foolish to stand on ceremony with one of the "inferior clergy." So they expressed their sentiments in language more forcible than polite. The Curate was rated for aiding and abetting their son in his rebellion. A stranger might have fancied their son a youth of fourteen, instead of a young man of twenty-three. Mrs. Headlong added the stinging taunt, that a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind. The Rectoress thereby intimated that a clergyman who so far forgot his duty, as secretly to make love to an Earl's only child, acted consistently in encouraging their son to disobey his parents ! To the Curate's request for an explanation, the Rectoress only replied, "You know perfectly well what I mean. If the cap fits, wear it." The worthy Christian lady then

ordered the Curate out of her presence in these Imperial words, "There! go away—go away! You are of no use to me at all." It is astonishing how very natural and human, some religious people can be, when they think it superfluous to keep up appearances!

On the third morning after this occurrence, Mr. Headlong, junior, was missing at breakfast. The servant reported that his young master's bed had not been slept in. Neither Rector nor Rectoress was alarmed at their son's disappearance. They concluded that he had turned sulky, and returned to Oxford. But when the day wore on, and confirmed the rumour that Miss Gnatstrainer had also disappeared on the previous evening, a very unpleasant suspicion possessed the minds of both parents! The report that the pair had eloped, was current in Laxington. Day after day, young Mr. Headlong had been seen talking to Miss Gnatstrainer in the shop; walking with her in the streets, the country-roads, and in the Park. Their simultaneous disappearance could not be accounted for more probably, than by an elopement. The Curate paid a visit of condolence at the Rectory. He was immediately pounced upon by both as a scapegoat!

"This is all your doing, Mr. Weatherall," cried the Rectoress, with that fine tact and sense of Justice distinguishing the Sex in general, and Parson's wives, in particular.

“ My doing ! ”

“ Yes, sir ; if you had done your duty, and supported us, Henry would never have ventured to disobey his parents.”

“ But he is not a child, nor a minor, but a man of twenty-three, with a strong will of his own. Surely he was rightly entitled to follow the dictates of conscience, in declining to enter the Ministry, and in selecting his wife——”

“ Selecting his *wife*, sir ! What do you mean ? ” cried the Rector aghast.

“ A *wife* ! ” re-echoed the Rectoress. “ You haven’t heard—you don’t know that they are married ? ”

“ I know no more than the current report that they have eloped together. Of course, I conclude that an elopement involves a marriage.”

“ Involves a fiddlestick ! ” exclaimed the Rector. “ Nothing of the sort.”

“ Why, sir, don’t you and Mrs. Headlong hope they are married ? ”

The Rectoress gave an inarticulate exclamation—almost a scream—expressive of astonishment, indignation, and disgust. The Rector said : “ Mr. Weatherall, do you mean to insult us ? Our son—our only child—married to a pert, ignorant, low, ill-bred hussey, the daughter of a canting Dissenter, who preaches and prays against the Establishment—my greatest enemy in the parish ? ”

“ I am no admirer of Mr. Gnatstrainer, but

I distinguish between father and daughter. From my own personal knowledge, you misconceive the character of the young lady, who is superior to her station——”

The Rectoress contemptuously interrupted: “The young lady! Don’t call a young person serving behind a counter, a young lady! The daughter of a grocer, too! A nice young lady, indeed!”

“She was excessively rude to me,” said the Rector. “Never mind, my dear; Henry will tire of her all the sooner. The projected marriage with Miss Askew, must be delayed. But it need not be definitely broken off, by this untoward incident.”

The Curate regarded the pair with astonishment. He could not at first credit such an utter absence of ordinary moral principle! At last he said, slowly:

“Mr. Headlong, do I understand you to say, you hope your son has not already repaired his sin, by making the *young lady* with whom he has eloped, his wife?”

“Understand me once for all, Mr. Weatherall. I hope my son has not carried his folly and filial disobedience to that extent. There is no proof yet that he has eloped with the young woman. But if he has done so, she is utterly unfit to be his wife, and our daughter-in-law. If my son has been mad enough to marry the calculating minx, I will disown and disinherit him. But an elopement does not necessarily mean marriage.

Young men must sow their wild oats. The matter may be hushed up."

"Then I understand you to say that, if not already married, you will not advise your son to make such atonement and reparation, to the woman who has given up family, reputation, all for him ; trusting to his honour ? "

"You put the matter very romantically, sir."

"I put it, as all persons of honour and honesty will see it."

"Certainly, I shall never advise my son to marry a woman beneath him."

"But if he loves her, does he not thereby prove her not beneath him ? "

"You well know I have other plans for my son. He must marry a woman of fortune."

"But, Mr. Headlong, such plans were very well, before the young man took an irrevocable step."

"The young man, as you call the young gentleman, my son, has taken no irrevocable step, in running away with a tradesman's daughter. Such escapades were thought little of, when I was at Oxford. The jade was willing enough, I'll be bound. She no doubt planned the whole thing."

"But, sir, consider ; if they have absconded together, travelled, and stopped at hotels, as man and wife, the girl's reputation is gone for ever, unless they marry."

"I can't help that. I've nothing to do

with that. People should bring up their children better."

"They certainly should! You speak as if your son had done nothing wrong! Whereas, in an elopement, the chief, if not sole blame, is laid upon the man. He is supposed to tempt and persuade the woman. Besides, sir, the young gentleman gave me to understand that you yourself suggested marriage with Miss Gnatstrainer——"

"He told an infernal lie!" roared the Rector.

"He told me your very words. 'You had better marry such an angelic creature.'"

The Rector blushed. His wife turned upon him with flashing eyes:

"Did you say such words, Henry?"

"He put me in a passion, praising her up, as actually superior to Miss Askew. I spoke ironically, implying the very reverse of what I said. Henry must have understood me. He never could have supposed I gave him permission to marry one whom I had just called a vulgar plebeian girl."

"He may have understood you literally. Your words may have suggested to him the idea of a private marriage, trusting to obtain your forgiveness afterwards."

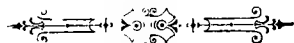
"He'll find himself mistaken then. I'll never forgive him, if he marries the girl. But what you say is all bosh. Henry knew perfectly well, I spoke ironically."

The Rector was angry with himself, and

troubled at the contemptuous looks of his wife. Mrs. Headlong was angry with her husband, for having irritated their son into rebellion. Rector and Rectoress were angry with the Curate, for siding with their son, against them. The Rector and his wife never admitted that they could do wrong. Both were practically infallible. The Rector ruled the parish. The Rectoress ruled the Rector. They both united to drive the Scapegoat into the wilderness. That is, they drove the Curate out of the Rectory, previously to a domestic fight between themselves. In vain the Curate tried to make them forgive their son for eloping, provided he married the partner of his sin. The parents, on the contrary, persisted in affirming the elopement a venial offence on their son's part, provided he did *not* marry the designing minx who had laid a trap to catch him! But if he made a *mésalliance*, they would never forgive him.

Finally, Rector and Rectoress summed up their injustice, by charging the Curate with having known their son's intention to elope; and declared that if there was, or should be a marriage, the Curate was to blame! They should hold him responsible for meddling in their affairs! And this in spite of the fact that he had been requested to do so! By this singular logical process, the blame was shifted entirely from the parents and son, and divided most impartially between Miss Gnatstrainer and the innocent Curate! The advantages of

a scapegoat were most apparent. The Curate retired, amazed and overwhelmed at such moral blindness. He relieved his feelings by asking himself aloud:—"Have these professing Christian teachers, the slightest sense of moral obligation?"



CHAPTER VII.

RESULTS OF THE ELOPEMENT.—THE RECTOR'S RAGE.—THE RECTORESS TO THE RESCUE.

IT was the second day after the Curate's visit to the Rectory. The Rector sat in his study, preparing a discourse against Cruelty to Animals! The selection of such a subject requires some explanation. From one point of view, no man was better able to treat of cruelty to animals. He had been all his life a sporting parson, engaged in tormenting, and destroying animals. Allowing for difference of period, very much such a parson, as Thackeray describes the badger-baiting Vicar of Queen's Crawley in "Vanity Fair." But our Reverend Sportsman entertained not the remotest idea that he had done anything of which to repent. When twitted with cruelty to animals, in hunting to death defenceless creatures, warm-blooded animals, belonging to the same Class as Man, *i.e.*, *Mammalia*, the Rector quoted Scripture to prove all animals made for man! He thereby showed himself as ignorant of Scripture, as of Natural History. The distinction implied in the phrase, "Man and Animals" is absurd; since Man is an animal. Scripture sanctions the legitimate use of some lower animals; not the abuse and

torture of any! This distinction the Rector, (like most sportsmen) could not, or would not, perceive. Latterly, however, Mr. Headlong had grown stiff in the joints; far too fat and heavy for hunting, and other field sports demanding violent exercise. Therefore, though he still rode to see hounds throw off, and occasionally assisted at the gentle sport of drawing a badger, the Rector astonished his intimates by posing as the Friend of Animals! There was, however, another and more personal reason. The Rector had often sneered at the Curate, for the decided change in his views and practice, respecting Hunting. The Curate defended himself as well as he could. He finished by saying that, however inconsistent he might seem, the Rector had no right to reproach him. The Rector had tried his best to dissuade him (the Curate) from preaching against Field Sports. The Rector had been all his life, a sportsman, and was only incapacitated by corpulence, from following the hounds. Unable to deny these truths, the Rector sought the reputation of being a Friend to Animals, that he might the more consistently reproach the Curate, for being a foxhunter!

The Discourse was an ingenious attempt to prove that there was such a sin as Animal Murder! The sentiments, however good and true in themselves, yet coming from a Sporting Parson, now too old to follow hounds, sounded insincere; and seemed calculated to excite

derision and contempt, by recalling the proverb of Satan reproving Sin! The Rector had just completed, and was reading aloud, an unctuous sentiment worthy of Joseph Surface: "For the man who would wantonly mutilate or, out of *malice prepense*, destroy a brute, is not to be trusted with human life! You may smile at the term *Animal Murder*; and say, truly, there is no such crime in the Statute Book. It is impossible to murder a lower animal, since it is regarded simply as so much property! Yes, my brethren! but we Christians own obedience to a higher law. To kill any creature—not for food, or to put it out of pain—but wantonly, for amusement; or to gratify the devilish passion of revenge against the owner, is an act of moral turpitude—a sin of which no one worthy the Christian name, could be guilty!"

Here, a knock at the study door, interrupted the Rector's train of thought, or, more correctly, the gratification of his own vanity.

He called out peevishly, with habitual ill-temper: "Come in."

His own body-servant entered with a letter.

"Oh! it's you, John! You know I can't bear to be interrupted, while preparing my sermons. Leave the letter, and go."

John went. The Rector recognised his son's writing, opened the letter, and read the contents, to this effect:

“DEAR FATHER,

“Forgive me for disobeying you. I could live no longer without my dear Agnes. And I could not bear to let her doubt me. We were regularly married the day before yesterday. We entreat your pardon, and will endeavour to prove ourselves your dutiful children. If you and Mother forgive us, I feel sure my dear wife will, in due time, come round to our way of thinking, and become a good Churchwoman. How do you get on with your sermon against Cruelty to Animals? Or, is it a lecture? *Apropos* to animals, I hope John looks well after my ponies and pointers. I know they miss me. And I do long to see them again. Dear Father, I hope you and dear Mother will remember your own youth, and that what is done, cannot be undone! I am proud of my dear wife. She wishes to be a daughter to you. She commissions me to add she trusts you will forgive her, for having once offended you, in the discharge of her duty. All that is wanting to complete our happiness, is a cheering word from you, and my dear Mother. God bless you both!

“Your affectionate son,

“HENRY HEADLONG.”

Some men, making no pretensions to belief in natural, or revealed religion, would have been softened by this affecting letter. How much more then, should it have touched the

heart of a Christian Clergyman, entrusted with the cure of souls, commissioned to teach, by precept and example. Such a man ought to be the model of all Christian virtues! To suppose that the Christian professor, told to forgive an erring brother, seventy times seven, would be too hard-hearted to forgive his only son, seems a satire on human nature! What a grand opportunity for the Man, the Father, the Christian, the Priest, to rise above all unworthy feelings, and forgive! To go forth like the Father of the Prodigal, and welcome his *two children*! Or, if unable to rise to such a height of magnanimity, unaided, the Rector could consult his wife. He was in the habit of being guided by her, in matters of less moment. Why did he not lay the letter before her? Had he done so, it might have touched her heart. She might have helped her husband to be a Christian. Truth and Literary Art, oblige the Author to relate the real result produced by the letter. However painful the relation may be, it conveys a most salutary moral. The Rector read the affecting letter twice over, as though he could not trust his eyesight. Then, he exploded in a volley of curses too shocking to be recorded. This uncanonical exercise greatly relieved his feelings, and perhaps saved him from a fit of apoplexy. It was some extenuation of this bad habit, that the Rector had heard a great deal of hard swearing, in the course of his sporting life, in the hunting field; from the jockeys,

grooms, and trainers who had been his intimates; from his fox-hunting friends, and boon companions at table. Then, he rushed like a madman at the bell-rope, and tore it down at the first pull! John must have been just outside the door. He entered immediately in great alarm.

"Whatever is the matter, sir?" "This letter!" gasped the Rector.

"Yes, sir."

"From Mr. Headlong."

"From Mr. Henry? I thought I knowed the 'and; Wot does young master say?"

"He's no longer your master, or my son."

"Lor, sir. Wot's the pore young gentleman been and done?"

"He's married — *married* — do you hear, John?"

"Yes, sir," sa John, who did not seem so surprised as the Rector expected.

"Married, in direct defiance of my commands."

"Wot's the lady's name, may I ask, sir?"

"She's no lady, but that low Dissenting young woman, Miss—What s her name?"

"Do you mean Miss Gnatstrainer, sir?"

"Yes."

"Is that all, sir? When I 'eerd the bell, I thought he had done somethink dreadful."

"Do you dare to take his part? Do you presume to defend his disobedience? To marry a canting Dissenting grocer's daughter, when

he might have had a rich and fashionable wife ! ”

“ Well Master, sir, it do look bad at fust sight. But— ” “ Here John hesitated for some appropriate consolation. Suddenly brightening up, he exclaimed triumphantly :—“ But sir, you see its only oncet in a way. Master Henry won’t do it agin. And it might have been a great deal wusser.”

“ Worse ! Impossible ! He could have done nothing worse for himself. I disown—abandon—disinherit him ! He is no longer my son. Never name him in my presence. Should he and the trollop he has married, dare to present themselves at the Rectory, don’t admit them. Do you hear ? ”

“ Yes, Master, I hear, but do think it over a bit. When you’re cool, I hope, I feel sure, you’ll countermand your orders.”

“ Never ! Now go—Stay, there’s something more. He hopes you look well after his ponies and pointers.”

This reference to his young master’s favourites, naturally made John think that his old master was inclined to relent. The old servant answered briskly : “ That I do sir, and well I may, for the pore things miss young master a’most as much as I do.”

“ He’s no longer your master.”

“ Oh sir, him as I dandled on my knees— ”

“ He’s very fond of those animals, I suppose ? ”

“ That he is, sir. Who could help being

fond of 'em. Don and Juno are never easy when Mr. Henry is away, and the ponies follor him about the paddock, like the dogs—"

"He would be sorry to have them killed!"

"Killed, master! It would go nigh to break Master Henry's heart, if anythink happened to them."

"Good! I can touch him home. Take my double-barrel, and shoot all four. Don't stand staring. Do as I order you."

"Ah, master, you're jokin'! You can't mean wot you say."

"I do mean it. I order you to shoot them."

"Wot! Shoot them pore dumb creatures, as love Master Harry, Missis, you, and hall of us; just to spite your own son!——"

"Obey my orders—or leave my service, without a character."

"Master! I've served you long and faithful, twenty-five years. I remember when Master Henry was born. I see him grow up, and loved him, as if he were my own son."

"Well, what of it?"

"Don't ask me to do wot you'll be sorry for, to your dying-day. Think better of it. It seems like committing murder——"

"Blast you! Don't stand there preaching to me. Stop your snivelling, and execute my orders."

"Master, you're not in earnest—you can't be. You're only trying my love for Master

Henry. Come, dear Master, say you're joking——"

"You'll find it no joke, if you don't obey me."

"But, Master, wot have them pore dumb creatures done to offend you? Nothink! You want to spite young master——"

"Once more, John, for the last time, I repeat my orders. Will you take the gun and shoot them?"

"I can't, sir—I raally can't."

"Strip off your livery. You shan't save them. I'll shoot them myself."

The Reverend gentleman went for his gun. John followed. He saw his master, gun in hand, and bent on butchery.

"You raally mean it, sir? You are going to shoot Master Henry's pets, yourself?"

"At once! Stand out of my way!"

"Stay, sir, I've thought better of it."

"Oh! you have," sneered the Rector.

"It's not to save my place, master, but my 'and's more steadier than yourn. You're all of a tremble. I can do it more merciful. I shouldn't like the pore brutes to suffer much."

This humane motive was supplemented by another still more urgent. Young Mr. Headlong had made John his confidant. The letter had been timed to arrive, when the Rector had got over the first shock of the elopement. John had undertaken to present the letter at the most propitious moment.

He could hardly have selected a better time, than when the Rector was writing his Discourse against Cruelty to Animals. A man who could write so eloquently against animal murder, was not likely to prove hard-hearted to his only son. So, the faithful servant had reasoned. John thought it extremely probable that his young master might be waiting in the neighbourhood, to see him. Under such circumstances, a meeting between the son and his father, carrying a loaded double-barrelled gun, to shoot his son's favourite dogs and horses, might result in murder! Hence John's determination to do the deed of blood himself. The Rector surrendered the gun. He was pitiless. John went forth. The Rector heard four reports. Soon after, John came in sobbing like a child.

"They're all dead, sir. God forgive me! You needn't go out, sir. You can trust my word."

John's evident uneasiness only made the Rector more suspicious. He therefore went out and verified the fact.*

The Parson looked coolly on the bleeding

* This incident is not imaginary. "The son of a clergyman in Dorsetshire, eloped a few days ago, with a cousin residing in his father's parish, and the couple were married in the chapel of the neighbouring workhouse. The reverend sire vented his fury, by having his son's two ponies and favourite dogs shot. He must be a ferocious savage, and entirely unfit to administer a parish."

—*Truth*, 11th December, 1884.

bodies of the four innocent victims of his rage; but a few minutes before, objects of beauty, full of life, joy, and love for himself! He then returned to his study. He was not exactly in cue to resume his sermon against Cruelty to Animals! He preferred writing a savage, inhuman, un-Christian letter to his only son! John again entered the room; this time abruptly, and without knocking for admission. Even in his present excited state, the Rector noticed a change in the servant's manner. He kept his hat on, sat down, and spoke in a familiar and disrespectful tone of voice.

"Wot's to be done with the corpses—bodies, I mean?"

"Whatever you like. Don't bother me. What the deuce do you mean by sitting down in my presence, with your hat on your head?"

"Killin' them pore beasts give me such a turn. I'm too weak to stand."

"Is that all? Well, I'll overlook it for once——"

"No, that's not all. I sit down covered, to show I despises you!"

The Rector doubled his fist, and made a stride towards his servant. Mr. Headlong had been a pupil of Jackson, and was once proud of his pugilistic "science;" the only *science* in which he was proficient! John sprung up, and put himself in a defensive posture. Master and man had often boxed

together with the gloves. John's blood was up. He exclaimed :

"Better not strike ! I won't take it from you. Don't rouse the devil in *me*. You deserve a sound thrashing, and I should like to give it you."

"Pooh ! you're drunk. You stink of rum !"

"I'll not deny I took a glass. I couldn't have done your butcher's work without it."

"Strip off your livery and come back for your wages. No more words. You shall not stay. I discharge you without a character."

"If you had not, I should have discharged myself. Do you think I would serve you—*now* ? Not, if you doubled my wages. As for character, where's your own ? When this day's work is known, no decent person in the parish will speak to you. Character indeed ! You can't give wot you haven't got yourself !"

"Leave the room !" thundered the Rector.

Left alone, a reaction began. The Rector did not repent, but feared the consequences of his short madness. After all, he, the Rector of Laxington, was not altogether above public opinion ; though he professed to be, and lived as if he were so ! The truth of John's parting words rankled in the Rectorial mind. He began to think it would be very unwise to follow the dictates of his offended dignity, and discharge John. He had been for twenty-five years, a faithful and attached servant, and was

under the combined influence of grief and drink. He might be bribed to bury the bodies of the poor animals, and to hold his tongue. A story of their sudden madness could be easily concocted, to account for shooting the ponies and pointers! Whereas John, dismissed without a character, would naturally and in self-defence, relieve his feelings by telling the truth; and so seriously, if not irreparably, damage the Rectorial reputation. To speak theologically, the Rector did not experience that sincere sorrow for sin called *Contrition*; but that pseudo-repentance through fear of punishment, named *Attrition*! Nevertheless, had he acted immediately, according to the suggestions of prudence, the proposed end might, and probably would, have been attained. For John would have been only too well pleased to compromise the matter, for the sake of sparing his young master, the agony of learning the truth, as to the sacrifice of his favourites. But the Rector sat for two hours longer, struggling with his familiar spirit, *Pride*! The demon was too strong to be cast out. So the golden opportunity was lost.

Meantime, John had made his preparations for departure, and then went to take a last farewell look at his four dead friends, lying, as they had fallen, in the stable-yard. Too absorbed in grief, to notice an approaching step, John was suddenly roused by feeling a hand laid on his shoulder. Looking up, he

beheld his young master, with a dangerous expression on his face!

Pointing to his dead favourites, he said, in a constrained, hollow voice :—" Who has done this ? "

" *I*, Master Henry."

" You, John Come, don't trifle with me *now*, I can't bear it. Who killed them? Was it not my——"

" No, sir ; upon my solemn word, *I* did it.

" You! John, are you mad ? "

" Maybe I am, or *was*, when I killed them. Come away, Master Henry. Don't look at them no longer. Come away, and I'll tell you all about it."

Young Mr. Headlong knelt down, and kissed each of his dead favourites. Then he drew forth his white handkerchief, and dipped it respectively in the blood of each in due proportion ; so that the white linen was now dyed all red. He then swore a solemn oath never to forgive the author of their death. Seriously alarmed, John (with the familiarity of an old servant and a confidant) used a gentle violence to draw his young master from the spot. Mr. Headlong allowed himself to be led mechanically a few yards. Then, John began to tell a lie. He was totally unaccustomed to this art, but he felt it his duty to attempt it. As a practical moralist, John was, undoubtedly, right. To say nothing of the fact that the World is governed by lies ; that Society is based on lying ; there are occasions when the best of

men and women would acknowledge it a clear moral duty to lie! This was one of such occasions. For if John had told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, then, young Mr. Headlong would, probably, have become a Parricide!

“You see, my dear young master, it was this way. The devil—you don’t believe in him—but I know there is a devil. He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The devil tempts us all more or less, to do wicked things. The liars” (so John pronounced lawyers) “give it another name. I can’t mind it now. Well, all of a sudden, I felt tempted-like, to shoot them pore things. So, I goes into Master’s room, where he keeps his whips, and guns, and rods, and fishing-tackle, and odds and ends; and I loads the double-barrel, and shoots ’em. I s’pose it was wot the liars” (lawyers) “calls a sudden somethink — impulse—a love of shedding blood, such as sportsmen are always gratifying legally, by shooting game. Only I had no license to shoot game, and so I shot the dogs and ponies instead.”

“John! you are not telling the truth.”

“As sure as I stand here; as I hope to be saved, I did shoot all four, myself.”

“Will you swear you did?”

“Yes, at oncet—on a Bible, if you wish.”

Young Headlong keenly scrutinised the old servant’s face, for a minute, and then said :

“Well, John, I believe you did shoot them yourself——”

“Oh! I did, sir, I would not tell you a lie.”

“Very well then, tell me the *whole* truth. You shot them—but you were ordered to do so?”

“Ordered—to—do—so” stammered John, quite unprepared for this cross-questioning.

“Yes, John, you’re not mad. All that about the devil tempting you, is nonsense. It won’t go down with me. You never would have done such a horrible act, out of your own head. Own the truth. My father ordered you to shoot them. You are silent. I knew it. Well, I’ll get the truth from his lips——”

“Stay, Master Henry—Suppose Master did order me to shoot them—there might be good cause——”

“Good cause?”

“Yes, Master Henry. When I said I was mad, I got mixed up somehow. Wot I meant was, *they* went mad—that is, Juno went mad fust, and bit Don, and Don bit Bob, and——”

“It won’t do, John. You’re not good at lying——”

“Stay—my dear young master. Don’t go nigh your father now, for Heaven’s sake.”—

“I must see him at once. Let me go, John. Come with me, if you like—but see him I must, and will.”

The impetuous young man was not to be restrained. John followed closely. Young Headlong burst in headlong fashion, into his father's study. The Rector saw it was now too late to act on his prudent reflection. He was not the man to temporise.

"Now, Father!"

"How dare you call me father?"

"It was a *lapsus linguæ* which shall not occur again. Answer me this one question: Did you order John to shoot my ponies and dogs?"

"I did."

"I need not ask why. To spite me for marrying without your consent."

"Put it that way, if you like."

"You know you had no other motive, but revenge on me, your son! And you committed this abominable wickedness, while actually preparing a sermon against Cruelty to Animals. 'Oh! for a *forty-parson power*, to chant Thy praise, Hypocrisy!'"

"How dare you?"—began the Rector. He paused, temporarily cowed by the blaze of righteous wrath in his son's eyes. The young man continued: "Interrupt me not, till I have said my say. You and I meet, I hope, for the last time in this world——"

"You anticipate my wish—I told you if you married that low young woman, I would disown and disinherit you."

"Keep your name. You have no pelf to leave. I covet neither. As for my dear

darling wife, I would as soon trust her with a wild beast, as with you.”——

“You are no longer my son.”

“*Amen* to that! You sent this good man to do a deed of blood, only inferior to murder! I found him weeping over their dead bodies, and guessed the truth. Yet the honest fellow lied to screen you. He could not deceive me. You ordered him to shoot them. You would have shot them yourself, had he refused. He shot them, that they might die easily, and not be mangled and vivisected by you, in your blind, brutal, ferocious fury for blood. I know now why he lied. To save you from the immediate effects of my vengeance. Bless him for that. He is my friend for ever.”

“How dare you thus insult your father, and a minister of the Gospel?——”

“Which you preach, but do not practise! You enlisted in another service, when you did this hellish deed. How does it differ from murder? To slay four of God’s creatures—beautiful, intelligent, docile creatures, who loved us both——”

“They were bought with my money.”

“That, of course, gave you a legal right to kill the dogs who licked your hand, the ponies who whinnied at your approach! To say nothing of the fact that they were given to me. Don’t you believe, clever clerical logician! that you will have to account for these four lives? Toplady declares beasts have souls——”

“An Evangelical—a Dissenter, gone astray!”

“He was little more than half your age, when he died. Yet *he* left a name as a Theologian and Humanitarian. His voice still teaches from the grave! He defended animals, in the days of a fox-hunting, hard-drinking clergy, whose names have long been buried in oblivion. He was rewarded by applause of conscience. *He* had visions of glory on his death-bed. The souls of your victims will haunt your dying-bed, and rise against you, in the Judgment day——”

“If you don’t cease your canting, and ask my pardon, I will hurl against you the double curse of a Father and a Priest——”

“Your fatherly and priestly curse will trouble me no more than Papal excommunication troubles you, and other Parsons! You have taught me to despise the curse of the biggest Priest in Christendom! You won’t frighten me by a curse from you, the Priest of a local church of half an Island; a church divided against itself, and in communion with no other!”

“Best come away, Master Henry,” exclaimed John, trembling with apprehension of the consequences.

“Not till I have finished.” Then he continued, addressing the Rector: “See this handkerchief, soaked with the blood of my four dear dead friends. I have sworn I will never forgive the man who ordered their blood to be shed. This red flag is now symbolical of the feud between us. I shall weep for them

by-and-bye, when I have done with you. Tremble lest you have invoked the curse of blood upon your own head! The time may come, when you would give much to have even a *dog* or *horse*, to love you! What have you got by your fiendish cruelty? I am of age. I had a right to marry the woman I love. I have done nothing wrong. Yet I wrote as a dutiful son. I proffered the olive branch. You, a Christian priest, rejected my overtures to peace. Your unregenerated heart preferred strife. You murdered my favourites, to gratify your revenge! You have succeeded with a vengeance! I have long wavered in my religious views. Your blood-thirsty act has decided me. I disown *you*! I renounce *you*! I excommunicate *you*! I would not live in the same house, or worship in the same church with you! I shake the dust from my feet against the Rectory, and against the tottering Establishment of the *Two Churches of England*, which breeds, shelters, and pampers bloated pluralists, preferment-hunters, and hypocrites like you! Now, you know why I refused to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles. With you as a warning, I preferred to remain an honest man. Henceforth, I am a Dissenter, and an active member of the Liberation Society. I hope to see the day, when the gown will be stripped from your back—when the world will know you as I now do. Meantime, your ferocious act of cruelty will cause your name to

stink in the nostrils of all worthy persons——”

The Rector, now mad with rage, rushed at his son! John ran between the two Headlongs. But for this intervention, the Rector would certainly have struck his son. The young man would probably have retaliated. And the conflict might have had a fatal result! Young Headlong was retiring, while John made a feint of squaring at the Rector, to keep him from attacking his son. The Reverend Head of the Parish, foiled in his attempt at manual punishment, was cursing his Son! At this critical moment, a new actor appeared on the scene, in the shape of Mrs. Headlong! She apprehended the whole situation at a glance, with a woman's quickness. She acted with her own womanly promptitude and determination. On seeing his wife, the Rector fell back, slightly ashamed of himself. The Rectoress took advantage of his temporary confusion, to slip the key from the inside to the outside; then, retiring, after her son and John, she closed, and locked the door!

“Mother!” was all her son could say.

She was a quick-tempered woman, full of prejudices and foibles. She had all the pride of her Caste, and was indignant with her son, for disappointing his parents' worldly plans, and forming a low connection. Under other circumstances, she would probably have taken her husband's part against her son.

But she knew the awful violence of the Rector's temper. She had seen enough to make her tremble. Her prompt interference probably prevented murder! Perhaps, too, she had actually seen the dead bodies of her son's favourites, or had been told the fact by the servants, and knew the provocation he had received.

At any rate, Mrs. Headlong showed she had a Mother's heart. She pressed her son to her bosom, embraced and kissed him fervently, and then said; "Go away at once, Henry! Your life is not safe, if you stay."

It was indeed time to go. The Rector, enraged at his ignominious position—locked into his own room—battered the door more like a mad bull, than a Christian clergyman. Truly does Horace characterise anger, as a short madness. Had the Rector been capable of reflection, he would have remained quiet. Then, the fact of his being locked in, might have rested a secret between him and his wife. But, in his furious rage, he preferred informing the whole household of his situation! But if the Rector behaved like a mad bull, the Rectoress had temporarily the courage of a Matador. She pushed her son away with loving violence, and saw him depart, attended by the faithful John. Then she went, and let out her husband, who had already relieved his feelings by kicking through the door-panel! Some women would have been nervous. Mrs. Headlong

opened the door, and confronted her husband without a sign of fear. This was her wisest policy. The Rector had been, a few minutes before, trying to kill his Son. The Rector now stood abashed and cowed, in presence of —*the Rectoress*—

“ ‘ Foil’d by a woman’s hand, before a batter’d ’ door ! ”

END OF VOL. II.



